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New York

President:	Mr. Adom	(Côte d'Ivoire)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

Central African region

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (S/2018/1065)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Central African region

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (S/2018/1065)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. François Louncény Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, and Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/1065 which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa.

I now give the floor to Mr. Fall.

Mr. Fall: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa since the issuance of the report before the Council (S/2018/1065). Allow me to highlight a few issues and update members on the most recent developments.

In Sao Tomé and Principe, on 22 November, the National Assembly was inaugurated and Delfim Santiago das Neves, from the opposition coalition, was elected as the Assembly's new President. On 29 November, President Evaristo do Espirito Santo Carvalho appointed Jorge Lopes Bom Jesus, the leader of the Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe/Social Democratic Party, as the new Prime Minister. On 3 December, the President swore in the new Government of Mr. Bom Jesus, which is composed of 12 Ministers, including three women, and two Secretaries of State. I must commend all stakeholders in Sao Tomé and Principe for their commitment to resolve their differences through constitutional mechanisms to defuse the tensions that arose following the 7 October legislative elections. I also congratulate the people of Sao Tomé and Principe for their tireless efforts to maintain peace and stability. This is a positive example to follow.

In Gabon, the situation remains calm after the legislative and local elections held in October. However, speculation over President Ali Bongo Ondimba's health conditions remains a source of concern, while some opposition and civil society leaders continue to criticize the decision by the Constitutional Court to amend article 13 of the Constitution, on 14 November, in order to authorize the Vice-President to chair the Council of Ministers in the event of the temporary unavailability of the Head of State. Meanwhile, in close coordination with key international partners, I have continued to hold meetings with political actors in Libreville and to urge all Gabonese to respect the Constitution and to preserve the unity, peace and stability of the country.

I remain concerned about the situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. I reaffirm the United Nations commitment to the territorial integrity and unity of the country. Violence has not diminished, and allegations of human rights violations by all sides continue to be reported. A Kenyan priest was shot dead on 21 November in Kembong, South-West region, and, on 24 November, three priests from the Archdiocese of Buea, South- West region, and one driver were abducted by unidentified gunmen.

The number of internally displaced persons and refugees in neighbouring Nigeria is still high. Several schools remain closed in the South-West and North-West regions. I am particularly concerned about the effect of the crisis on women and children. During my visit to Cameroon from 17 to 22 November, I met with key Government officials and stressed to all actors the necessity for inclusive dialogue as a constructive and sustainable way forward towards a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

I welcome the efforts of the Government to provide humanitarian access and assistance. That is a step in the right direction. In that regard, I also appeal to the Government to continue to safeguard access by humanitarian partners to the populations in need and to ensure that all human rights violations are addressed. I was encouraged by the Government's commitment to

putting in place plans to address the root causes of the crisis, including through accelerated decentralization and the activities of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism. I encourage national authorities to pursue such efforts, including by implementing confidence-building measures as soon as possible.

On 30 November, President Biya signed a decree creating the National Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, based in Yaoundé, with regional centres in Bamenda, Buea and Mora, respectively in the North-West, South-West and Far North regions. The National Committee, which is under the authority of the Prime Minister, is responsible for organizing the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants of Boko Haram and the armed groups in the North-West and South-West regions. As part of a wider dialogue framework, I encourage the Committee to work in close consultation with relevant groups, including civil society and communities, in order to ensure that the particular needs of the three regions and their populations are met. The United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) stands ready to support the Government in its efforts to seek a lasting solution to the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions, as well as to continue assisting national authorities in the fight against Boko Haram in the context of existing regional frameworks together with the relevant regional States and organizations.

In Chad, legislative elections, which have been due to take place since 2015 and were originally scheduled for November 2018, were postponed. I encourage the Chadian authorities to hold those elections as soon as possible and call on the international community to provide the necessary financial support to the Government of Chad, as required. At the same time, I welcome the effective functioning of the national framework for political dialogue, which is playing a key role in preparation of the legislative elections. On 6 and 7 December, while in Chad for the ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa (UNSAC), I met with members of the Government to discuss, among other things, peace and security issues in Central Africa and increasing conflicts between farmers and herders in the context of transhumance. I was also encouraged by the commitment of national authorities to ensure the safety and security of the population in the Tibesti desert, near the border with Libya, affected by recent attacks carried out by armed elements. I appeal to the Chadian authorities to seek peaceful ways to address that situation in a sustainable manner.

(*spoke in French*)

The recent increase in violence in the Central African Republic poses a threat to security in the subregion. A large part of the population remains internally displaced and in need of humanitarian assistance. In accordance with my mandate for the region, I continue to urge the countries of the subregion to ensure that their efforts coalesce in supporting the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and to maintain their concerted and constructive commitment during the critical phase of the implementation of a possible agreement. Moreover, I continue to support the work under way to operationalize and revitalize the joint commissions comprised of the Central African Republic and its neighbours as mechanisms for improving cooperation among those States in the effective management of cross-border issues. I will continue to enlist the necessary support for the African Initiative in cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic, Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga.

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continues to threaten the security of the population in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I therefore encourage the African Union to adopt a comprehensive and cautious approach in its ongoing efforts to replace the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the LRA in order to eliminate the possibility of any security vacuum that the group could exploit to relaunch and intensify its destabilization activities.

Violent extremism and terrorism remain a significant threat to the security and development of the subregion. Although much progress has been made in the fight against Boko Haram, that terrorist group continues to pursue its indiscriminate attacks on defence and security forces and civilians. In response, the countries of the subregion continue to intensify their efforts to combat the group through better cooperation. It is important for the States of Central and West Africa to develop strategies that address the root causes of the insurgency. To that end, I welcomed the holding on 29 November of an extraordinary summit of the Lake

Chad Basin Commission in N'Djamena to discuss the ways and means of responding to the recent increase in Boko Haram's activities in the region.

The joint summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States on peace, security, stability and the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, held in Lomé on 30 July, marked an important step for both subregions in their fight against shared security threats. UNOCA has already begun to take action, in conjunction with the ECCAS secretariat and in cooperation with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), to support the effective implementation of the Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, which sets out the decisions arrived at during the joint summit. Accordingly, a meeting of experts from the ECCAS secretariat and the ECOWAS Commission has been planned to agree on a joint action plan for the implementation of the Lomé Declaration. In the meantime, I continue to work closely with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, in coordinated support of efforts to address the threats posed by terrorism and violent extremism.

Insecurity related to transhumance is increasing in Central Africa. According to reports, on 22 November eight people were killed in a clash between farmers and herders in Abéché, in eastern Chad. In that regard, the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa is facilitating discussions on that issue, which is transnational in nature and has economic, security, political and environmental implications. UNOCA will continue to work with ECCAS to address that issue, while maintaining close cooperation with UNOWAS, given the issue's interregional ramifications. During the first half of 2019, Special Representative Chambas and I will conduct a field visit to some of the areas affected by the conflicts between farmers and herders. UNOCA, which serves as the secretariat for UNSAC, supported the holding of the forty-seventh meeting of the Committee in N'Djamena from 3 to 7 December 2017. To date, UNSAC is the only forum enabling Central African States to meet regularly at the ministerial level to discuss common security issues.

The Secretary-General of ECCAS and I took that opportunity to call on all ECCAS member States to ratify the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly — known as the Kinshasa Convention. Together with the Director of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, we launched a joint project on the margins of UNSAC, entitled "Support for African States towards achieving the vision of 'Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020': capacity-building of Central African States".

In accordance with the mandate granted to it by the Council, UNOCA remains committed to supporting Member States and subregional organizations from Central Africa, in particular ECCAS. While supporting efforts to maintain peace, I urge ECCAS member States to remain committed to the institutional reform of that subregional organization and to accelerate that process. I am confident that the successful completion of its reform will be an important step for the organization in improving its functionality, including funding mechanisms, in order to ensure the effective implementation of key projects in the areas of peace and security and governance.

As recommended by the Security Council in its presidential statement S/PRST/2018/17 of 10 August, the mandate and activities of UNOCA will be subject to strategic review in 2019, prior to the submission of the Secretary-General's next report on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the Regional Office. In that regard, I welcome the Council's continued support for the specific role played by UNOCA as the United Nations regional office responsible for political affairs and peace and security in a subregion that has considerable resources yet faces enormous challenges, requiring a concerted and coordinated approach by the international community. As Head of UNOCA, I remain committed to providing the best possible support to Member States and to producing positive results in preventing conflict and maintaining peace in Central Africa.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Fall for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ghelani.

Ms. Ghelani: Violence, extreme poverty, climate change and population growth are driving record

levels of vulnerability among millions of people in Central Africa. My briefing today focuses on the main humanitarian crises in the region, including those affecting the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Chad and Cameroon.

Out of the estimated more than 180 million people living in Central Africa, nearly 26 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2019. That is a dramatic increase of 22 per cent from 2018. One person out of seven in Central Africa is caught up in a crisis and in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and protection. That is compared to a global calculation of 1 in every 70 people.

Around half of those requiring humanitarian assistance and protection in Central Africa are found in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The humanitarian situation in the country has deteriorated further in 2018 and is one of the world's largest and most complex crises. As noted in resolution 2439 (2018), the Ebola epidemic in the north-east is occurring in a context of much wider humanitarian needs. Ebola has already claimed 289 lives and is still spreading. The response is particularly difficult given the extremely challenging security environment, with attacks against civilians by non-State armed groups interrupting Ebola containment efforts. To mitigate the possible impact in the event that the outbreak spreads to neighbouring countries, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, yesterday approved a $10 million regional allocation from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

The welcome attention given to the Ebola outbreak should not, however, overshadow the multitude of simultaneous crises that affect the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In all, more than 12 million people need humanitarian assistance. The current cholera outbreak is the largest on record over the past 15 years. With more than 26,000 people affected and almost 900 deaths this year, cholera has killed even more people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo than Ebola. The security situation has deteriorated in the east of the country causing new and large-scale displacements of people in search of safety and protection. Furthermore, the influx of more than 360,000 Congolese nationals returning from Angola is adding pressure to the fragile Kasai province, already affected by years of inter-ethnic conflicts.

I have just returned from the Central African Republic, where, as Special Representative Fall noted in his briefing, the humanitarian situation is also extremely dire. Areas that were relatively stable in the past, such as the south-east, where recovery and development programmes are about to be rolled out, have this year relapsed into conflict. The escalating violence has taken a heavy toll on the people of the Central African Republic, with 2.9 million people — well over half the population — now requiring humanitarian assistance. The number of internally displaced persons has reached more than 640,000 — an increase of over 60 per cent in this year alone. One in four children in the country is displaced. While the needs have grown, the increasing number of security incidences, including direct attacks on aid organizations and their staff, has made it even harder to access the people requiring assistance.

As previously noted, the worsening situation in the Central African Republic has also had a significant impact on neighbouring countries. Cameroon is today hosting 268,000 refugees from the Central African Republic, while Chad is hosting more than 100,000 refugees. That translates into a significant burden on already vulnerable host communities, and many of the refugees have few prospects of returning home to the Central African Republic in the near future.

Furthermore, Chad and Cameroon, in addition to Nigeria and the Niger, are seriously affected by the crises involving Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin. Now in its ninth year, that regional crisis has led 2.4 million people to flee their homes, and some 10.8 million people currently require humanitarian assistance and protection. Continuing insecurity remains a major impediment to people being able to return home and re-establish their livelihoods. The protection situation in the Lake Chad basin remains particularly serious, with frequent killings, kidnappings, suicide bombings and other attacks attributed to Boko Haram, as well as high levels of sexual and gender-based violence. Girls remain at serious risk of kidnappings and continue to be used for suicide attacks. As Special Representative Fall noted, the situation for women and children is particularly concerning.

Beyond the regional crisis in the Lake Chad basin and the influx of refugees from the Central African Republic, Cameroon is facing an additional humanitarian crisis in its South-West and North-West regions, as already expressed. Since the Council was last briefed by Special Representative Fall on Central

Africa half a year ago (see S/PV.8284), internal displacement in those parts of Cameroon has tripled and today counts more than 430,000 internally displaced persons. In addition, more than 30,000 Cameroonians have fled across the border to Nigeria, seeking refuge. This is now one of the fastest-growing displacement crises in Africa. The majority of the displaced persons are hiding in dense forests, without adequate shelter and lacking food, water and basic services. Schools and markets are also being disrupted and there are alarming health needs.

As highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1065), we note with grave concern the deteriorating situation with respect to the protection of civilians, including reported killings, the burning of homes and villages, extortion and kidnappings in the South-West and North-West regions of Cameroon. There have been multiple attacks on schools and threats against students and teachers, including two large-scale abductions and subsequent releases last month of 78 students and 3 teachers in Bamenda and 20 students in Kumba.

Despite limited access, humanitarian partners are scaling up their presence in those parts of Cameroon. Food distribution has so far reached more than 17,000 people and some 4,000 people have received shelter materials. However, severe underfunding has had a significant impact on the humanitarian community's ability to respond to the escalating crisis. The main sources of funding are currently CERF — whose rapid response allocation will be depleted at the end of this month — and the agencies' own internal, unearmarked funding.

The lack of funding experienced by humanitarian partners in Cameroon reflects a broader regional trend. This year, every single humanitarian response plan in Central Africa — for Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo — is funded far less than the global average of 56 per cent. Cameroon is the least funded of all, at 39 per cent of the requirements. This needs to change if the humanitarian response in the region is to be fully effective, and we are calling on Member States for their urgent support.

Over the past six months, not only have the humanitarian crises in Central Africa persisted, but several have grown further. Many of the crises are rooted in ongoing armed conflicts. Strengthening the protection of civilians — a core issue on the Security Council's agenda — is of the utmost importance in that region. Our hope is that today's discussion will take us further towards a collective response that is commensurate with the needs and aspirations of the people in Central Africa.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Ghelani for her briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I wish to thank Special Representative Fall and Ms. Ghelani of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for briefing the Council today and for all that their respective teams are doing in what is a complicated and difficult region, as they have both set out.

Today, I will address issues that affect the region as a whole: the situation in the Anglophone north-west and south-west regions of Cameroon and the impact of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin. I will not address the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi or the Central African Republic, as we have the opportunity to discuss these issues in other Council meetings.

The United Kingdom welcomes the holistic approach that the Special Representative has taken, both with this report (S/2018/1065) and to promote peace and stability in Central Africa. An approach that covers the political, humanitarian and human rights situation and addresses root causes is crucial to conflict prevention and resolution. We also welcome the work of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) to drive forward the women and peace and security agenda under resolution 1325 (2000). We encourage UNOCA to continue to focus on building the capacity of regional organizations to enable delivery of their early-warning mechanisms, conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives.

I would like to focus now on a country of particular concern in the region — that is, Cameroon. I should start by saying that the United Kingdom recognizes the many positive contributions Cameroon is making to stability in the region, including its continued commitment to the fight against Boko Haram and the sanctuary that Cameroon offers to refugees from Nigeria and the Central African Republic. However, we are concerned by the reality of the rapidly deteriorating

security and humanitarian situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon.

In particular, we are concerned about high levels of displacement and take very seriously Ms. Ghelani's warning that this is now one of the fastest growing displacement crises in Africa. Reports of human rights violations and abuses perpetrated by armed separatist groups and Government forces — including extrajudicial killings, other killings, abductions, restrictions of movement and restrictions of access to health and education, as described in the Secretary-General's report — mean that we must always be alert to the risk of the situation escalating, affecting the broader peace and stability of the Central African region. We have already seen over 30,000 Cameroonians flee into Nigeria. If grievances are not addressed, tensions are likely to increase further.

These concerns are not new. I raised them in the Council's discussion in March, as did others (see S/PV.8212). Unfortunately, we have not seen the action needed to address the situation and, since March, it has deteriorated further. We welcome President Biya's recent pledge to address the situation, but words alone will not improve things. We strongly urge the Government of Cameroon to take urgent action, including by actively addressing the situation through inclusive dialogue with the Anglophone leadership to address underlying issues; undertaking confidence-building measures in order to defuse tensions and build conditions for dialogue, including the release of political detainees and implementing the Government's own commitments on decentralization and the recommendations of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism; and allowing full humanitarian access and access for human rights monitors to all parts of the country. I would also hope and expect that our own Special Representative of the Secretary-General will have access to wherever he wanted to go. Accountability must also be ensured for all those responsible for human rights violations and abuses. We also call on the armed groups involved to cease their attacks on civilians; to allow full humanitarian access and access to human rights monitors; and to engage with the Government on these issues.

The United Kingdom, for its part, is committed to supporting Cameroon, and I am pleased to announce today that the United Kingdom is contributing $3.1 million to the United Nations response in the Anglophone regions. That is equivalent to 20 per cent of this year's flash appeal for the Anglophone crisis to address immediate humanitarian and medical needs. We strongly encourage other Member States to fund this as an important part of the conflict prevention effort. Preventing a crisis costs significantly less than resolving one.

We have raised our concerns quietly and directly with the Government so far, and we are committed to working with the Government of Cameroon in every way we can to help resolve this situation. But I fear that, unless action is taken and the situation improves, concern over the situation in Cameroon is likely to increase among Security Council members and become a more prominent part of our discussions.

In addition to Cameroon, I would like to raise our ongoing concerns about the humanitarian and security situation in the wider Lake Chad basin, which continues to deteriorate. The United Kingdom has played its part in providing humanitarian support, as well as significant support particularly to assist the Nigerian security forces in the fight against Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA), but this matter needs the ongoing focus and support of the international community.

The deteriorating security situation in north-eastern Nigeria is of particular concern and one, I note, that is shared by the Secretary-General. ISWA has increased the frequency, range and sophistication of its attacks and has attacked forward operating military bases in north-eastern Nigeria. The execution by ISWA of humanitarian workers like Saifura Khorsa and Hauwa Liman, who were both abducted while providing antenatal care to communities in desperate need, is a telling reminder of the brutality of the activities of ISWA.

Let me conclude by reiterating that we have an opportunity to prevent further conflict and the inevitable suffering and insecurity together. I hope we can all act to do so.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): We thank Special Representative Fall and Ms. Ghelani for their briefings today and for their tireless and very important efforts. They can count on our support, both in the preventive action of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the humanitarian efforts of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Advocating for an increased focus on preventive diplomacy has been a priority for Sweden throughout our tenure on the Council. One of the most effective operational tools the United Nations has for preventing conflict is precisely its regional offices, which are uniquely positioned to engage in constructive dialogue and provide political accompaniment, with local knowledge, continuity and respect. They can take a comprehensive approach to challenges and support countries in addressing the root causes of conflict, as well as effective and coordinated regional responses, including to promote regional integration, cross-border cooperation and development. The work of these important regional offices and of our regional envoys must therefore continue to be actively supported, and we believe that their capacity should be further strengthened.

My Foreign Minister, Ms. Margot Wallström, witnessed first-hand the devastating effects of climate change on local communities, especially women, during her joint visit to Chad this summer with Special Representative Fall and Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed. Climate-related security risks are among the challenges that require both a holistic approach and a regional response. We welcome the expanded analysis on climate and security in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/1065). We hope to see that approach also replicated in other regions and in all parts of the United Nations system.

The increase in conflicts between farmers and herders, aggravated by the impact of climate change, is a worrisome development. We welcome the regional plan to reinforce conflict prevention and early-warning mechanisms at the national and regional levels, with the participation of women and youth. We appreciate UNOCA's efforts in that regard.

The situation in Central Africa has been dominated by elections in a number of countries in the subregion, as we have just heard. We must continue to ensure the equal and unhindered participation of women in those processes, including possibilities to run for office. The situation room platform, set up by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Cameroon, is a good example of how women can be encouraged to take part in elections. Operationalizing the regional action plan for the women and peace and security agenda remains critical, and related initiatives by UNOCA and regional organizations should be supported.

In the spirit of preventive diplomacy, the deteriorating situation in Cameroon must be addressed. We are deeply concerned over the acute humanitarian situation that I have described today and the massive displacement caused by the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions of the country. Continued disturbing reports of grave violence, including extrajudicial killings, abductions and restrictions of movement, must be investigated, and accountability for all human rights violations and abuses must be ensured. A continued crisis risks having serious regional implications, including on the fight against terrorism in the Lake Chad basin and efforts to bring peace to the Central African Republic. As we have heard today, that is the fastest-growing displacement situation, which represents a clear threat to international peace and security.

To change that trajectory, the post-electoral period should offer a window of opportunity. We therefore urge all parties to immediately end the violence call on the Government to urgently take concrete steps to build genuine trust and confidence, as underlined by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Fall this morning. That includes engaging in an inclusive, mediated dialogue with communities in the English-speaking region, as well as to release political detainees. Safe and unhindered humanitarian access must always be ensured, in accordance with humanitarian principles. Access should also be provided to human rights monitors and the media to help establish the facts.

United international engagement is needed to assist Cameroon in managing the crisis, including building trust and overcoming divisions. International support is also needed to address the humanitarian situation. We therefore encourage the Government to seek support from the United Nations and regional actors. If the crisis continues to deteriorate and steps are not taken to address the situation, the Council should consider options for more active engagement in a spirit of prevention.

The security situation in the wider Lake Chad basin remains one of deep concern. The number of attacks carried out by Boko Haram has increased in recent months and the humanitarian situation is not improving, as we have heard. The international community needs to do more to support national and regional efforts in addressing the situation. We welcome UNOCA's continued support to the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the implementation

of the regional strategy for stabilization, recovery and resilience of the areas affected by Boko Haram. Sweden will continue to contribute, including with substantial humanitarian assistance, as well as through the European Union's development cooperation and support, to the Multinational Joint Task Force in the fight against Boko Haram.

In conclusion, United Nations regional offices, including UNOCA, have an important role to play as the United Nations moves towards a prevention-centred approach in the spirit of sustaining peace. Many of the security risks that we face today, such as climate change and terrorism, are not bound by national borders but will, by default, need regional and international responses. Beyond our membership on the Council, we will continue to advocate for effective conflict prevention, including through supporting regional responses by United Nations regional offices and regional organizations. We expect to remain a major humanitarian donor in response to the huge needs outlined by Director Ghelani today. We urge others to join us and respond to her appeal this morning.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I would like to thank Special Representative Fall and Director Ghelani for their briefings today. Their work is vital to a region facing a wide range of political, economic and social challenges, particularly in Cameroon, on which I will focus my remarks.

The security and humanitarian conditions in Cameroon's North-West and South-West regions have significantly deteriorated since the previous briefing to the Security Council on the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), held in June (see S/PV.8284). Violence continues to escalate, obstructing vital humanitarian aid delivery to over 430,000 internally displaced persons and blocking health and education services to rural children.

October was the most violent month on record in Cameroon in recent years. Judging from anecdotal reports, we fear that November will surpass October as the bloodiest month on record. We do not want to see that horrible trend continue again in December. The violence must stop now. Violence between Government and Anglophone separatists has resulted in killings and abductions of civilians, including a United States missionary, who was killed on 30 October.

Faced with mounting insecurity, tens of thousands of Cameroonians have fled to neighbouring Nigeria, as we have heard, while hundreds of thousands have been internally displaced and need humanitarian assistance. The stakes in Cameroon are too high for that crisis to continue unaddressed. Cameroon remains an essential security partner in the fight against Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa, including as a member of the Multinational Joint Task Force. The continuing crisis threatens to detract from our mutual security objectives in the Lake Chad basin.

The United States calls for an immediate and broad-based reconciliatory dialogue, without preconditions, between the Government of Cameroon and separatists in the North-West and South-West regions. We urge all sides to forswear violence, restore peace and resolve their grievances through political dialogue. We note that in his inaugural address on 6 November President Biya expressed confidence that "there is an honourable way out in everyone's interest". We encourage President Biya to make good on his commitment to accelerate the decentralization process and adopt the recommendations of the Cameroonian National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism.

The creation of a Government-led humanitarian assistance coordination centre is a promising development. However, the Government has done little to address concerns over its own lack of respect for the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality and the guarantees of unhindered access to conflict-affected populations. We urge the Government of Cameroon to prioritize respect for humanitarian principles and ensure unobstructed access for United Nations agencies and humanitarian non-governmental organizations assisting conflict-affected populations.

The United States believes that UNOCA, through the good offices of Special Representative Fall, could provide technical assistance and mediation support to facilitate a broad-based reconciliatory dialogue without preconditions. We hope that the Economic Community of Central African States, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU) and the AU Commission will enhance their efforts to support the peace process. We encourage them to coordinate with UNOCA in that effort.

A peaceful and stable Cameroon is critical to regional stability in Central Africa, and both deserves and requires the continued and close attention of the Council. As noted by our Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs last week, the last thing we need, given

the challenges in the region, is for a disproportionate response by security forces to result in the growing radicalization and hardening of separatist groups.

In the presidential statement that we adopted in August (S/PRST/2018/17) the Security Council called for a strategic review of UNOCA's mandate by 1 August 2019. We look forward to further discussions in the coming months to make sure that UNOCA's mandate is appropriately focused on the most pressing political challenges in the Central African region and that they are well-coordinated with the four United Nations missions operating in the same geographic area, so as to ensure that our efforts have maximum impact and maximum efficiency.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): First, allow me to thank Special Representative Fall and Ms. Ghelani of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their very clear briefings today. Let me also thank their teams for the very important work that they are doing.

I will focus on three issues today: first, the situation in Cameroon; secondly, the need to have comprehensive risk assessments for the root causes of conflict; and, thirdly, the importance of coordination among the different United Nations offices in the region.

Teachers and lawyers in the Anglophone region of Cameroon asked for their minority rights to be protected in a peaceful protest two years ago. Today the health and education sectors are shut down. Indiscriminate violence has led to civilian deaths, reportedly by the Cameroon army and the armed groups. There are over 437,000 people displaced, and there is a clear risk of spillover to the wider region. The escalation of violence shows that conflict prevention requires more than just words; it must be followed up with action.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands fully supports the territorial integrity of Cameroon. We call on the Government to start a meaningful and inclusive dialogue with all relevant parties, including with women representatives. We fully support the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Fall and call on the Government of Cameroon to implement confidence-building measures, including the release of political prisoners. We thank the Special Representative for his recent visit to the country and for giving this crisis the attention it deserves.

Human rights violations by all parties need to be investigated and the perpetrators should be held to account. We call on the Government of Cameroon and armed groups to grant full access to human rights observers and humanitarian workers to the Anglophone regions. To address the needs of the displaced population, increased funding of the humanitarian relief plan is essential.

With regard to my second point, on the need to strengthen joint and comprehensive risk assessments for all root causes of conflict, the situation in the Lake Chad basin continues to be a matter of concern. As highlighted in the two briefings today, the situation provides a breeding ground for organizations like Boko Haram and causes instability and displacement.

During our presidency of the Council in March, the Kingdom of the Netherlands organized an open briefing on the root causes of conflict in the Lake Chad basin (see S/PV.8212). Briefers, Council members and affected countries confirmed the urgent need to address the root causes of conflict, including climate change and water stress in the Lake Chad basin. Presidential statement S/PRST/2018/17, on UNOCA, which was adopted in August, highlights the needs for risk assessments and long-term strategies to support stabilization and build resilience in the Central African region.

As confirmed in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1065) in a section specifically addressing the topic, the adverse effects of climate change continue to be a threat to regional stability. UNOCA has an important role to play in developing sound risk assessments and ensuring conflict- and climate-sensitive programming. We encourage UNOCA to continue to work with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the African Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Economic Community of Central African States and other relevant organizations to build on the information in the report of the Secretary-General through further joint risk assessments for climate- and water-related security risks.

That brings me to my third and final point, on cooperation among the United Nations offices in the region. Given the complex situation in Central Africa, it is important that the different United Nations offices in the region maximize their cooperation and complement each other. It is essential that each office focus on its niche role. The Kingdom of the Netherlands sees a clear role for UNOCA to focus on conflict prevention, given

its unique position as a regional office. In that light, we welcome the Special Representative's engagement on the process of peaceful elections in countries that are not served by other United Nations offices, including in Sao Tomé and Principe and Gabon, as well as on cross-border issues, including transhumance and farmer-herder conflicts. It is important that the Special Representative be allowed to use his good offices in the best possible way in the countries he focuses on. We encourage all United Nations offices in the region to consider how to further increase cooperation and efficiency in the future.

In conclusion, the important work of UNOCA and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Fall show us that there are situations in Central Africa that are at risk of becoming a threat to international peace and security. We hope that, the next time the Council meets on this item, we can see that joint efforts by the United Nations and Governments in the region will have led to tangible results.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We grateful for the convening of this briefing and the briefings provided by Mr. François Louncény Fall and Ms. Reena Ghelani.

At the outset, we want to acknowledge and support the important work being carried out by the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) in harmonizing efforts and forging strategic partnerships to tackle cross-border threats and the root causes of conflicts affecting the Central African subregion, which, in many cases, is carried out under difficult political and security conditions. We underscore the consistent and systematic deployment of good offices and the work of the Office to bring together and arrive at agreement among various stakeholders to support various peace processes. We also commend the support UNOCA has provided in the holding of elections in four countries of the subregion and its promotion of greater participation by women in politics.

We would also like to highlight the political dialogue and confidence-building measures that UNOCA has been fostering among political and civil society actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in view of the upcoming elections to be held in December and in line with the political agreement of 31 December 2016. We also acknowledge and express our gratitude to UNOCA and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the work they are undertaking in Cameroon and the important role that they are both called upon to play in order to prevent a further deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation in the North-Western and South-Western regions of the country and to promote better respect for human rights.

We note with sorrow and concern the repeated escalations of violence in that country and in much of the subregion, which continues to claim lives. We condemn the terrorism of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region and of the so-called Lord's Resistance Army in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Political instability, institutional fragility, extreme poverty and environmental degradation, which have been exacerbated by climate change, continue to produce forced displacement, humanitarian crises, violent extremism and massive human rights violations, including gender-based violence. In that connection, we welcome UNOCA's participation in and support to various conferences and workshops designed to strengthen local capacities to address those challenges and protect the most vulnerable groups through holistic and consistent strategies that are in line with the objective of building sustainable peace.

We emphasize the relevance of initiatives aimed at investigating and dismantling the links between terrorist groups and criminal organizations involved in the illegal exploitation of natural resources and poaching. We welcome the European Union's support for those efforts, which are equally important in protecting the environment.

We also stress the importance of promoting greater participation by young people in the political and economic life of their respective countries, in accordance with the study carried out by UNOCA, the Economic Community of Central African States and UNESCO. We would like to recognize UNOCA's efforts to foster adequate coordination with regional organizations, such as the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States. Cooperation among those organizations should foster synergies to achieve more effective execution of their respective mandates, under the overarching objective of building sustainable peace.

I conclude by stressing that the international community must increase its support to those most in need in the Central African subregion and to efforts to address the root causes of conflicts and

humanitarian crises and guarantee free and safe access for humanitarian and human rights agencies.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First and foremost, allow me to thank Mr. François Louncény Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), and his team for the comprehensive and enlightening briefing on the activities of UNOCA in Central Africa.

In the light of the important work being undertaken by UNOCA in the subregion, allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to support the extension of UNOCA's mandate to 31 August 2021 so that it can continue to fulfil its mandate to hone and take a comprehensive and integrated approach to the areas of capacity development for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the Central African subregion.

Strengthening the cooperation framework signed in June 2016 between UNOCA and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) secretariat and closely monitoring the tripartite agreement signed on 23 May 2011 in Khartoum by the participating parties are essential to ensuring security along their shared borders, given the porous nature of those borders, which is a source of tension. That tension poses major challenges, which are linked in particular to arms trafficking, piracy, transnational organized crime, the proliferation of armed groups, mercenary activity and maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea.

We urge UNOCA to continue to work hard to create synergies to promote bilateral cooperation among neighbouring countries to strengthen cooperation with regional and subregional organizations — in particular the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community and the Gulf of Guinea Commission — on matters of peace, security, and conflict prevention. In that context, we thank the Government of the Republic of Chad for hosting the forty-seventh ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa (UNSAC), which took place from 3 to 7 December in N'Djamena. I would like to point out that some of the issues addressed at that meeting concern the mercenary activity in the Central African subregion. That phenomenon is currently of great concern to the region, given the exponential increases in the uncontrolled circulation of weapons and the conflicts taking place in the region, which pose a serious threat to the peace and security of the States of the subregion. It should be noted that the mercenary activity that we have witnessed in the past years is being perpetrated by adventurers and illegal uncontrolled entities whose objective is always to destabilize Governments and sow desolation in the countries they seek to invade.

I would like to recall the statement made by the President of the Security Council dated 10 August 2018 (S/PRST/2018/17), in which the Council recalls the important work carried out by the Special Representative and Head of UNOCA over the past three years as set out in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/521). It acknowledges, inter alia, that UNOCA plays an important role in facilitating inclusive dialogue in Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of the Congo, Sao Tome and Principe and Chad, and in promoting stability in the region and preventing and mitigating electoral and post-electoral crises. I would also like to recall the letter dated 16 July 2015 addressed to the President of the Security Council by the Secretary-General (S/2015/554), which informs him of the extension of UNOCA's mandate to enable the Regional Office to cover the electoral cycle process in the subregion.

As we are a country of the Central African subregion that is integrated into its regional and subregional economic communities, Equatorial Guinea encourages Governments and all political actors implicated in the ongoing politico-military crises of our region to continue on the path of inclusive internal dialogue and close regional and subregional cooperation, bearing in mind that if the subregion in particular and Africa in general succeed in overcoming these challenges, it would facilitate the achievement of the African Union's Agenda 2063. It would be difficult to achieve that without the participation and involvement of political actors and the different strata of society in an inclusive dialogue.

In that perspective, and aware that national cohesion and the peaceful resolution of conflict can be achieved only through inclusive national dialogue, His Excellency Mr. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, convened on 18 July our sixth national political dialogue round table, in which Mr. Fall and his team participated. That initiative enabled the pardoning of all political prisoners on 2 October in commemoration of Equatorial Guinea's fiftieth anniversary of independence, which

helped bring calm and promote harmony throughout the country.

We countries of the subregion are highly mindful of the efforts of the Government of Cameroon to reach a peaceful and dialogue-based solution to the internal crisis being faced by the Anglophone regions of that brother country. We call on the international community to support the Government's efforts and to provide UNOCA with the means necessary for it to continue to carry out its constructive role. The fact that presidential elections were held in Cameroon a few weeks ago without major incidents is proof that those efforts are being carried out. Let us not limit ourselves to making calls to the Government of Cameroon, let us also provide it with support so that it can carry out those efforts to overcome the crisis.

Let me conclude my statement by congratulating Mr. Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, for the excellent work he is doing in our subregion; for highlighting his ongoing contact with our Governments; for conducting frequent visits and promoting dialogue; and for his presence at all the major political events in each of our countries. All of that gives him an exhaustive knowledge of the day-to-day political events in the subregion, as demonstrated by the briefing he gave us today.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): Let me start by expressing our gratitude to Mr. François Louncény Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), and Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their comprehensive and informative briefings.

Central Africa continues to face serious political and security challenges; however, we have noted some positive developments towards the consolidation of democratic governance. As electoral processes dominate the political agenda in the region, we commend the fact that several of them took place without major incidents. Nevertheless, further steps towards consolidating stability are needed. Building trust among all the stakeholders remains an essential precondition for the establishment of a stable and constructive political environment.

We praise the important work carried out by UNOCA in terms of good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation, as well as in support of the United Nations and regional initiatives to achieve peace and security in the region. At the same time, we remain concerned about the human rights situation in some countries of the subregion. Poland calls on the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi to take immediate steps to prevent further violations and abuses in that regard and to ensure respect for the fundamental freedoms for all citizens. We also appeal to the authorities of Cameroon to take the necessary mediation efforts aimed at a peaceful resolution of the crisis in the South-West and North-West Anglophone regions.

The security situation in Central Africa remains complex and fragile. Many sources of instability persist, including cross-border threats such as illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources, as well as violent conflicts between herders and farmers. Climate change is a root cause of conflicts and a threat multiplier in Central Africa. We must emphasize adaptation to climate change and at the same time work to strengthen countries' resilience to such threats.

Acts of terrorism and violent extremism also continue to hamper socioeconomic development. We are concerned about the fact that Boko Haram and the Lord's Resistance Army continue to pose a serious threat to security across significant parts of the region. Poland condemns all acts of violence by those groups, including attacks on civilians, the recruitment of children and sexual and gender-based violence. In that context, we welcome the African Union Peace and Security Council's decision to maintain its regional cooperation initiative for eliminating the Lord's Resistance Army, and hope that it will obtain renewed support from other international partners. It is important that the underlying causes of these problems receive an urgent and consistent response, especially through the promotion of good governance and economic reforms, since the unstable situations in some States of Central Africa are the main cause of the humanitarian crisis that persists throughout the region.

In conclusion, Poland fully supports the actions undertaken by the United Nation and the European Union in Central Africa. At the same time, we recognize the key role of the relevant regional partners and organizations and commend their efforts to address the challenges to peace and security and enhance regional cooperation. I also want to express our full support to Special Representative Fall and the staff of UNOCA.

We are grateful for their continuing efforts to advance peace and security in Central Africa.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. François Louncény Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Ms. Reena Ghelani for their information on the situation in the Central African subregion.

We firmly believe that the approach that is fundamental to effective crisis prevention and conflict resolution in Africa is one that combines a leading role for the African people themselves with support for their efforts on the part of the international community. In that connection, we welcome the efforts by the countries of Central Africa to counter the threats and challenges that they face, including through the joint programmes and initiatives to combat Boko Haram and ensure maritime security. Those efforts unquestionably need additional international support. In that context, we note the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa in strengthening peace and security in the region, as well as Special Representative Fall's personal good offices.

It is important to continue to expand our engagement with regional stakeholders, including the Economic Community of Central African States. We concur with the assessment in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/1065) that Central Africa is dealing with a huge number of challenges on the security, political and economic fronts. Boko Haram's terrorist activity remains one of the chief threats to regional peace and stability and also brings with it serious humanitarian consequences, particularly in the Lake Chad basin region. In that context, we must not lose sight of the fact that the destabilization in the region assumed catastrophic proportions in the wake of the collapse of statehood in neighbouring Libya. The situation in Libya is still far from normalized and continues to have negative repercussions for the situation in the region in general. We welcome the efforts undertaken by Africans themselves to eradicate the terrorist threat, and we hope that the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel can make a meaningful contribution to stabilizing the security situation in the subregion.

The situation in the Central African Republic is very worrying. Armed groups have engaged in brutal clashes over resources and territory. We support President Touadera's efforts to hold an inclusive political dialogue, work quickly to reform the security sector and improve the armed forces' capacity. For our part, we will continue to fully support the country's nascent national reconciliation, acting in coordination with the authorities in Bangui and with the African Union and the leadership of the Sudan, as well as with other stakeholders seeking ways to normalize the situation there.

One of the other factors behind the instability in the Central Africa is piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. In the light of the unceasing attacks on vessels along the coast of Somalia, a dangerous trend is emerging. We must not forget the importance of a comprehensive approach to combating piracy. We hope that with the support of the international community the pan-regional efforts will help to solve the problem of piracy in an area as economically important as the Gulf of Guinea.

We note that the destructive capacity of the Lord's Resistance Army has shrunk considerably in the past few years. Its numbers have fallen and its activity is limited to sparsely populated areas in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We believe that it should no longer be seen as a significant threat to peace and security in the region.

Like my colleagues, I would like to briefly touch on Cameroon. We are monitoring developments there closely. The information we have is troubling but so far extremely contradictory and not something that we should base any hasty or far-reaching decisions on. We understand the concerns of our British and American colleagues about the information on violations of the rights of the English-speaking population. I have to say that I can only hope that London and Washington will display an equally principled attitude to the infringements on the rights of the Russian-speaking population that are happening right under our colleagues' noses in the Baltic States and Ukraine. With respect to Cameroon, it is important not to cross the line between prevention and intervention in States' internal affairs. There is every evidence that a number of our colleagues have come very close to that. For the time being we have every reason to believe that Cameroon is capable of dealing with this tricky issue by itself. We are willing to help, but only if our partners in Cameroon deem it necessary. At this stage, we urge all the parties in Cameroon to refrain from violence and focus on substantive national dialogue.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the threats and challenges that the Central African

region is dealing with today are closely entwined and interrelated, while the States themselves are highly dependent on one another. The destabilization of the situation in one country is liable to ignite the entire subregion, shattering the security of its neighbours. It is therefore exceedingly important to keep a finger on the pulse of evolving events, for which the activity of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa is useful.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Mr. François Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary General and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), for his briefing on the political and security situations in the Central African region, including the Lake Chad basin, and the activities of UNOCA during the last six months. I also want to thank Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for her briefing.

We note that the major political developments in the region during the period covered by the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/1065) were related to the holding of elections and preparations for the presidential, parliamentary and local elections scheduled to be held on 23 December in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that connection, we want to congratulate Mr. Fall for using his good offices in helping to prevent election-related violence. We would also like to recognize the contributions of the regional actors, international partners, religious organizations and local community leaders who are helping to resolve hostilities, in some cases by facilitating the cessation of military or insurgency operations.

Fights for resources in areas such as illegal mining, the exploitation of wildlife and forest products, cattle rustling and transhumance-related clashes are taking more aggressive forms in some countries in the region. In that connection, we want to encourage UNOCA to continue its critical role, particularly in support of inter-State and intercultural mediation efforts.

We should encourage combined mediation efforts, law enforcement and political dialogue involving local communities in order to reduce long-term socioeconomic tensions. United Nations peacekeeping missions and other agencies must work to help reduce and avoid cross-border conflicts. The implementation of the peace process in the Central African Republic led by the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, particularly efforts aimed at achieving a direct dialogue between the Government and the main armed groups, continues to be a priority. Similarly, the progress made in implementing the 31 December 2016 political agreement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is an important step towards ensuring long-term stability in the region, and UNOCA's support to those efforts is also instrumental.

As we all agree, despite many efforts, the armed violence in the eastern and north-eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the Central African Republic, as well as the recent repeated attacks by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin and other intercommunal conflicts there continue to present serious obstacles to peace and stability in the region. The deteriorating humanitarian situations in the Central African Republic and the Lake Chad basin, chiefly owing to land degradation and diminishing resources, are creating chronic food insecurity, malnutrition and loss of livelihoods. Those are hard facts that cannot be ignored, and it is important to ensure that the international community and the Council provide the necessary support. We should also note the displacements that are triggering humanitarian crises, including return movements that are exacerbating the problem in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's greater Kasai region and Tanganyika province. We agree with the Secretary-General's report that the increased frequency of attacks by armed groups in the Beni area, which continue to hinder the efforts to prevent the Ebola virus disease outbreak in North Kivu province from spreading, has been another challenge for the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We believe that the efforts of countries in the Central African region to stabilize their economic and monetary situations, as well as the reform activities of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community aimed at improving real gross domestic product growth, are an encouraging sign of the prospects for development. The support of the international community in that regard will be vital to ensuring success across the entire spectrum of socioeconomic development in the region. Enhancing coordination between the United Nations, the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other international partners will be essential to facilitating coherent and

effective stability, reinforced by the impetus provided by economic development.

We support the recent validation of a stabilization, recovery and resilience strategy for the region by the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission in the areas affected by activities of Boko Haram, as well as the continued commitment of the troop-contributing countries to the Multinational Joint Task Force in their fight against terrorism and transboundary crimes. We also appreciate the decision of the African Union Peace and Security Council concerning the need to maintain the African Union's regional cooperation initiative for the elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army, as the security vacuum in the area is worsening. In Cameroon, we encourage the primacy of internal consultations, inclusive dialogue and silent diplomacy.

In conclusion, we strongly support UNOCA's continued efforts and the personal commitment of Special Representative Fall, who is working with all regional and international actors, particularly with a view to implementing the African Union's vision of silencing the guns in Africa by 2020. That unquestionably requires a holistic and coordinated effort.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. François Louncény Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, and Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings. I also wish to commend the efforts and activities made by members and staff of the Regional Office in discharging its mandate.

I shall focus on three aspects in my statement.

First, with respect to the security and political situations in the region, the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/1065) on the situation in the Central Africa region outlines the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, as well as a detailed explanation of the recent political, economic, social and security developments in the region and their impact on peace and security in Central Africa and the States that are facing various challenges there. On the political level, elections have taken place in a number of Central African States, such as Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Gabon and Cameroon, without significant violent incidents, despite ongoing security instability in Cameroon. We share the concerns expressed by the Secretary-General regarding the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situations in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon.

The scheduled elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are 10 days away. We hope that they will take place with inclusiveness, transparency and safety. In that regard, we emphasize that the political processes and the elections in any State of Central Africa, if conducted in an inclusive, free and credible manner, represent an important step towards maintaining peace and security and achieving the peaceful transfer of power. That would also have positive effects on stability across the whole region.

We are monitoring the political and security developments in the States cited in the report, and would like to stress the importance of the efforts made by the Regional Office, as well as the regional organizations and United Nations peacekeeping operations in the region, with the aim of establishing a comprehensive dialogue between Governments and all community groups, especially in certain States of the region, and attaining the political transfer of power during the upcoming periods.

We are very concerned by the waves of violence and armed conflict in the region, regrettably claiming innocent and civilian lives. We need to find radical solutions to stop the violence and hold the perpetrators accountable. In that regard, we condemn in the strongest terms the criminal acts, suicide attacks, repeated armed attacks, looting and abductions perpetrated by Boko Haram and the Lord's Resistance Army in the region. Those acts hinder progress made at the political, security and development levels and even at the social and humanitarian levels. It is the responsibility of the United Nations, the Security Council, regional and subregional organizations and all the States of Central Africa to confront those attacks and ensure that sustained and common solutions are found for acts of vandalism.

Secondly, we regret the generally worsening humanitarian situation in the region. The number of those in need of urgent humanitarian assistance is on the rise, as is the number of refugees and forced displaced persons. The reason is violence and the outbreak of cholera, Ebola and other diseases.

Regional organizations have cooperated with the States of the region, and we commend the adoption by the Economic Community of Central African States

(ECCAS) of a strategy to prevent and combat terrorism in Central Africa. We also commend the decision to carry out a comprehensive reform of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX). We pay tribute to the fruitful cooperation between ECCAS and the Economic Community of West African States, as embodied in the summit convened in Lomé in July. The summit exemplified the genuine commitment of both communities to working together to address the various challenges faced by the States of the region. We look forward to the continued cooperation between the two communities and other international partners interested in achieving the desired peace and stability in the region.

Thirdly and lastly, cooperation between the Regional Office and other regional and international organizations. The many challenges faced by Central Africa, such as the increasing number of conflicts linked to transhumance, climate change, armed conflict and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, along with other economic challenges and social problems, require serious cooperation among the Governments of the region, ECCAS, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, the African Union and all regional and subregional organizations. Such cooperation is necessary if the aspirations of the people of the region to stability, security and decent living conditions are to be fulfilled. This is all the more crucial, given that the region has a vast wealth of natural resources, which, if properly tapped, would help it to achieve those aspirations.

I would like to conclude by thanking once again Mr. Fall and the staff of the Regional Office for their tireless efforts.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Louncény Fall and Ms. Ghelani for their informative briefings.

We commend the calm with which the majority of the electoral processes in Central African countries took place and encourage all countries in the subregion to work towards consensus in all areas in order to build peace and stability. Similarly, we invite them to develop measures to build trust in those processes and encourage the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) to continue to support the holding of inclusive, credible and peaceful elections. In that regard, we acknowledge the work that UNOCA conducts in those areas, including mediation, preventive diplomacy, and the support it provides to regional and subregional organizations in order to contribute to the reduction of tensions in the region.

With that in mind, we welcome the Joint Summit held on 30 July between the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on peace, security, stability and the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. Similarly, we commend the work of the UNOCA secretariat at the forty-sixth ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa and look forward to the speedy adoption of a declaration on confidence-building measures. We commend the endorsement of the regional action plan on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. We believe that greater women's participation in the area of decision-making will enable progress to be made in building peace in the region. We encourage UNOCA to continue its efforts in that regard and to continue promoting the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). We also appreciate the study conducted by UNESCO and ECCAS on the status of youth organizations in seven Central African States in order to combat violent extremism.

We also welcome the various workshops and technical meetings that were held in partnership with subregional organizations. The assistance provided by cooperating with such organizations should not be overlooked, but rather, further deepened, under the principle of respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of each of the States in which UNOCA implements its mandate. Current and emerging threats should be addressed by working with those organizations in order to diminish the impact they could have on stability in the subregion.

In the same vein, we welcome the regional seminar held in Libreville on the regional integration strategy paper for Central Africa for 2018–2025, developed by the African Development Bank, which recommended accelerating the process of regional integration in Central Africa and finalizing the strategy document on regional integration. Similarly, we praise the endorsement of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region.

In line with the points I have just mentioned, we reiterate that consideration should be given to

replicating the initiative of the Group of Five for the Sahel in Central Africa, in order to address security and counter-terrorism challenges, within an institutional framework of regional cooperation and coordination. In that regard, we highlight the progress made by the Multinational Joint Task Force and regional and international partners in their fight against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin, as well as the efforts of the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission, in line with resolution 2349 (2017). We believe that, to address those challenges, both the countries of the region and the international community, as a whole, must delve into their root causes. One such cause is the lack of control over the exploitation of natural resources which, in turn, are used to supply and finance the illegal activities of armed groups, including the Lord's Resistance Army — a group that continues to pose a threat to the security of civilians in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We also urge the international community to take into account the humanitarian situation in the subregion. In the Central African Republic, as of 1 October, the number of refugees has increased to more than 572,000, while approximately 616,000 are internally displaced persons. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, approximately 13 million people are in need of protection and humanitarian assistance, 8 million are facing food insecurity and 4.5 million are internally displaced. In addition, they all face the threat of diseases, such as Ebola, and lack basic services.

With respect to Cameroon, we echo the sentiments expressed by the delegation of Ethiopia, with regard to the Government's primary responsibility of addressing the challenges faced within the framework of political dialogue. It is imperative to continue working and redoubling efforts to mobilize political, technical and financial support in order to achieve peace, stability and development in Central Africa. With that in mind, ongoing support should also be given to the work of UNOCA which, together with the Multinational Joint Task Force, the various entities of the United Nations system, regional offices and country teams, among others, devote their efforts and commitment to achieving peace and stability in the subregion.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Mr. Louncény Fall, for his briefing and, in particular, for his efforts at the helm of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). France shares his overall analysis of the situation in Central Africa and assures him of its full support. Not only are the efforts of Mr. Fall very relevant and reflect the value-added of a regional approach to understanding the situations and the dynamics of conflicts, which are often interlinked; they also allow for a preventive approach. That is why France welcomes the three-year extension of the UNOCA mandate, which will enable the Regional Office to conduct its mission of good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation, as well as its support for regional initiatives towards peace and security in Central Africa, in particular, strengthening its partnership with the Economic Community of Central African States.

In addition to the fight against Boko Haram, which, regrettably, remains on the agenda, four situations deserve special mention today. First, let us consider the Central African Republic. We are concerned about the security situation, which remains volatile, as seen by the outbreak of violence in Alindao in mid-November. That new wave of violence is a reminder that disarming armed groups, restoring State authority throughout the country and protecting civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, remain priority issues in the Central African Republic. It is imperative that the armed groups commit immediately without preconditions to the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. We also reiterate our full support for President Touadera and recall our commitment to assisting the authorities of the Central African Republic in finding a solution to the crisis. To that end, it is necessary to continue to promote the rapid and ambitious implementation of the African Union (AU) road map.

The African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic is the only platform for holding discussions with the armed groups that includes the participation of neighbouring States from which a comprehensive political agreement could result. It therefore appears necessary that direct dialogue between the Government of the Central African Republic and the armed groups take place as soon as possible. It will be incumbent on the African Union and the future United Nations-AU Joint Special Envoy to identify the modalities of the meeting that must take place between the Government and the armed groups.

We would encourage the authorities of the Central African Republic to take the necessary steps to achieve a national consensus on the implementation of African

Initiative. The people of the Central African Republic voiced their views on many issues during the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation. The fight against impunity is a key component to the reconciliation process. As Ms. Reena Ghelani just reminded us, the humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic must continue to galvanize us, as more than half of the population is suffering from extreme poverty and in need of humanitarian assistance.

Lastly, we are counting on the support of all Security Council members for the renewal of the mandate of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic this afternoon.

The second situation involves Cameroon. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his commitment to confronting the crisis in the English-speaking areas and for the approach he has taken vis-à-vis the Cameroonian authorities. France is concerned about the deteriorating situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. The toll in human lives is becoming increasingly high, and the humanitarian situation is increasingly difficult with — I believe — nearly 30,000 refugees in Nigeria and more than 400,000 internally displaced persons. In this regard, we are pursuing our own efforts aimed at encouraging the Cameroonian Government to take ambitious steps to achieve a lasting settlement to the crisis through inclusive political dialogue, de-escalation measures and broader decentralization measures with respect for the unity and integrity of the country. It is necessary that access to humanitarian assistance to those in need be facilitated and that the perpetrators of human rights violations be prosecuted.

The third situation involves the Democratic Republic of the Congo. France is concerned about the events that have punctuated the elections campaign over the past several days. In particular, France is dismayed by reports according to which live ammunition was allegedly fired to disperse protesters, and calls on the Congolese authorities to shed full light on these incidents.

The general elections, scheduled to be held 23 December, represent a historic opportunity as the first-ever democratic and peaceful transfer of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. France calls on the Congolese authorities to create the necessary conditions for the holding of credible elections in a peaceful environment. We must stand ready to support the electoral process in close cooperation with all African partners in the event that the Congolese authorities request us to do so.

Finally, turning to Burundi, we are concerned about the recent developments in that country. In particular, I note the temporary suspension of the activities of foreign non-governmental organizations, the absence of the Government at the fifth and last session of the inter-Burundian dialogue in Arusha, and last week's closure of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In this regard, we reiterate our support for the mediation led by the East African Community. We hope that the forthcoming summit of this organization, to be held on 27 December, will lead to tangible solutions to facilitate the holding of free, transparent and peaceful elections in 2020.

Preventing conflicts, avoiding the escalation of existing crises and smoothing the way for a return to lasting peace demand a cross-cutting and holistic approach that considers all the dimensions and factors of conflicts as well as their root causes, whether they be inequality, the illegal exploitation of natural resources, or climate and environmental conditions. They also demand responses and commitments at the regional level. In this regard, United Nations regional offices, such as the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, are a critical tool for strengthening the capacity of the Organization to act in a more effective manner. France will continue to support this constructive and necessary evolution in the work of the Organization in the service of international peace and security in a spirit of coherence and greater partnership with African stakeholders.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General François Louncény Fall and Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their respective briefings.

Recently, progress has been made in the political processes in the countries of the Central African region. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) held a joint summit of their Heads of State and Government and adopted the Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism

to strengthen subregional cooperation in the fields of peace and security. China commends and welcomes those developments.

On the other hand, the Lord's Resistance Army, Boko Haram and other armed groups and terrorist organizations continue to pose serious threats to the countries of Central Africa. The international community should pay greater attention to this and support countries of the region in their efforts to respond. The settlement of regional issues requires the cooperation of all parties. To achieve collective security and common development in Central Africa the joint effort of all countries is needed. The United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) can play an active role in this regard. China would like to emphasize the following three points.

First, respect for the leadership of Africa is a precondition for resolving regional issues. In recent years, the African Union (AU), the ECCAS and other regional and subregional organizations have committed to finding strength in unity and solving African issues in an African way. Many efforts have been made to promote regional peace and development. When assisting Central Africa in solving its issues, the international community should fully heed and respect the views of the countries concerned and maintain close communication with regional and subregional organizations, such as the AU, help them strengthen capacity-building and enhance their capacity to solve their problems independently.

Secondly, achieving security and stability is the foundation for the region's long-term development. China appreciates and supports UNOCA in exercising its good offices and its role in mediation and preventive diplomacy, while continuing to promote political dialogue in the Central African Republic and other countries of the region. The international community should provide further support to such cooperation efforts among countries in Central Africa, for example, in combating cross-border arms smuggling, drug trafficking, terrorism and organized crime with the aim of achieving regional peace and stability as soon as possible.

Thirdly, promoting economic development is a guarantee for the long-term stability and security of the region. ECCAS, ECOWAS, and other subregional organizations play an important role in promoting regional integration and development in Central Africa. The international community should support UNOCA and Special Representative Fall to strengthen coordination with the relevant regional and subregional organizations, promote cooperation in the economic and social fields and help countries in Central Africa achieve development and eliminate the root causes of conflicts. China stands ready to continue working to strengthen cooperation with Central African countries and to support the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNOCA so as to play a constructive role in helping the countries in Central Africa maintain security and stability, cope with economic difficulties and improve the humanitarian situation.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General François Louncény Fall and Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their informative briefings that have contributed to our meaningful discussion today. We also underscore the President's excellent stewardship of the Security Council this month.

Kazakhstan recognizes the importance of the work of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) in preventive diplomacy and mediation, as well as the support it provides to regional and subregional organizations to achieve lasting peace and stability.

We express our deep concern at the violence perpetrated by armed groups in the Central African Republic against civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. We also strongly condemn the increasing incitement of ethnic and religious hatred and violence. We note the important role of the African Union and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in promoting peace and reconciliation in the Central African Republic. We fully support the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, which is an essential tool in stabilizing the country. We highlight the regional dimension of the conflict in the Central African Republic and therefore believe that the further strengthening of political and financial obligations on the part of regional guarantors and international partners will increase the effectiveness of this mechanism. Providing coordinated support to the Central African Republic authorities and its political process is important for any future resolution of tensions.

The unrelenting atrocities committed by the Lord's Resistance Army in the subregion and their subsequent negative impact on the civilian population, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, remain the biggest threat to the peace and security of the entire region. We stress the importance of regional and international support for the African Union Regional Task Force, especially in the context of the security vacuum, which has been exploited by the Lord's Resistance Army and other armed groups in order to intensify their criminal activities. We commend the decision of the African Union Peace and Security Council to maintain the African Union-led Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army, and we also call on the African Union and international partners to provide renewed support for this mechanism.

The security and humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad basin deserves urgent attention. The terrorist attacks and destabilizing activities of Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant have caused large-scale loss of life and the displacement of civilians, with a devastating humanitarian impact. In this regard, we welcome the recent validation of the regional strategy of the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission for the stabilization, recovery and resilience of the areas of the Lake Chad basin that have been affected by the actions of Boko Haram. In view of the urgency of the situation, we encourage international partners to speedily disburse their pledges.

The States of the region have encountered unprecedented challenges in combating terrorism. We must therefore support UNOCA's outreach to coordinate the activities of regional organizations in the fight against terrorism. The challenges posed by widespread violent extremism and the continuing threats to cross-border security and crime are exacerbated by the illicit influx of small arms and light weapons throughout the region. We welcome the outcomes of the first Conference of the State Parties to the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and All Parts and Components that can be used for their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly, including its decision to establish a secretariat with a trust fund. This Convention contributes to Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative and creates a framework for Africa to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. It is important for countries that have yet to ratify the Convention to do so at the earliest opportunity in order to boost its implementation and facilitate resource mobilization.

Despite the existing problems in the region, we note the commitment of countries and efforts aimed at increasing subregional integration and ongoing reforms to strengthen democratic governance by facilitating the electoral process, in order to ensure peaceful, free, fair and credible elections. Still, much work remains to be done to implement confidence-building measures, consolidate the gains achieved and make progress towards the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's strategies and programmes, in particular Agenda 2063 and Silencing the Guns by 2020, which should be carried out with the support of the international community.

UNOCA is therefore playing a coordinating role as the secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, thereby making an invaluable contribution. It is important that the African Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the United Nations continue to work towards formulating and implementing a well-coordinated regional strategy and finding the root causes of the crisis, which are transnational and transboundary. At the same time, to be effective and streamlined, the United Nations must deliver as one, with a strengthened security and development nexus for more enduring political and socioeconomic stability, together with a robust approach involving regional collaboration and the engagement of influential countries and leaders in the region.

Upon the completion of its term as an elected member of the Security Council for 2017-2018, Kazakhstan is stepping down at the end of this month. We were deeply committed to Africa, as we see its great potential as a rising leader in the world's economy in this century. We see its great promise, as well as its problems. Even though this is the last meeting on UNOCA and the Lake Chad basin during my delegation's term in the Council, we will continue to address and support Africa in overcoming the threats that it faces. We offer our solidarity to help the region achieve the great objectives it has set for itself. Kazakhstan will continue to work through the General Assembly and other forums to accomplish the vision of the African continent and its people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

My delegation is grateful to Mr. François Louncény Fall for his briefing on the biannual report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1065) on the sociopolitical and security situation in Central Africa and the Lake Chad basin and on the activities carried out by the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), within the framework of his mandate.

I would like to inform Special Representative Fall that in Côte d'Ivoire, as in his country, the outstanding efforts he is undertaking in a subregion that is close to the hearts of all Africans, but which unfortunately finds itself today confronting tremendous problems stemming from human inconsistency but also because of the unpleasant surprises that nature sometimes keeps in reserve for human existence, are greatly appreciated. I am thinking in particular of the rapid drying up of Lake Chad, which was once a source of life and which is now becoming a source of problems that, in turn, has brought about vast humanitarian needs. That is why I would like to welcome the presence among us this morning of Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and express my gratitude for her comprehensive briefing and for all that she has done to draw our careful attention to the humanitarian issues in the subregion.

Côte d'Ivoire commends the recent progress made in a number of Central African countries, including the holding of elections under more or less peaceful conditions. However, my delegation remains concerned at the persistence of such multifaceted political and security challenges as armed conflict, terrorism, trafficking in natural resources, poaching, transnational organized crime and maritime piracy, all of which have disastrous humanitarian consequences, as I mentioned before.

In the Central African Republic, the absence of State authority across significant parts of its national territory, the contradictory attitudes of leaders of armed groups vis-à-vis their commitment to a comprehensive peace agreement in the Central African Republic, the resurgence of ethnic and religious violence, such as the deadly events of 15 November in Alindao, in the north-east of the country, as well as the repeated attacks against the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, all remain sources of concern. Given that situation, Côte d'Ivoire commends and further encourages the efforts of the President of the Central African Republic, Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, and his Government in giving priority to constructive dialogue and consultation with all national and regional actors, including armed groups and civil society, with a view to achieving inclusive and indispensable national reconciliation towards realizing a lasting peace.

In that regard, the implementation of the road map of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, to which my country extends its full support, could be the key to a peaceful and lasting end to the crisis in the Central African Republic. In this context, the decision of the United Nations and the African Union to jointly appoint a Special Envoy to generate fresh momentum in the implementation of this initiative is of paramount importance. Moreover, the commitment of countries of the region — and neighbouring States in particular — including through joint commissions, remains fully relevant to the efficient management of this crisis, especially in light of the challenge of transnational crime.

With regard to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, progress made in the implementation of the political agreement of 31 December 2016, known as the New Year's Eve agreement, and the smooth conduct of preparations for the general elections on 23 December 2018 — which are so important for the stability of the country and the subregion — are welcome developments. In order to maintain this positive momentum, my delegation calls on all Congolese political actors to work to create an environment conducive to the conduct of free, transparent, credible and peaceful elections. Furthermore, the vast challenges posed to security, humanitarian and health — particularly in the eastern part of the country, which is marked by the persistence of the Ebola virus — require the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the international community to intensify and better coordinate efforts in order to cope with this epidemic.

In this regard, resolution 2439 (2018), adopted by the Council on 30 October, which concerns Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the action of all relevant stakeholders — including the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and bilateral and multilateral partners — is necessary in the fight

against the epidemic in order to create an environment conducive to the return of lasting peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Turning to the situation in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire commends the efforts of the East African Community facilitator and the mediator of the Inter-Burundi Dialogue with a view to ensuring its inclusiveness while addressing the crisis plaguing this country. However, we fear that the absence of the Government of Burundi and certain political actors at the fifth session of the inter-Burundian talks, held from 24 to 29 October in Arusha, will contribute to relaunching the stalemate in the political process. Therefore, my delegation encourages the international community, the African Union and the Community of East African States to continue in their efforts for peace and stability in Burundi towards the holding of peaceful elections in 2020.

The security situation in the Lake Chad basin is also a source of concern to my delegation in view of the continuing threat posed by Boko Haram, whose criminal and terrorist activities have disastrous consequences for civilian populations, particularly children, women and girls in Cameroon, Chad and the Niger. In the fight against this scourge, we welcome the implementation of a regional strategy, endorsed by the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission on 30 August, for stabilization, recovery and resilience in the areas of the Lake Chad basin affected by Boko Haram's activities. We call on international partners to honour their pledges of assistance, as announced on 3 and 4 September in Berlin at a high-level conference on the Lake Chad region.

Furthermore, the actions of the Lord's Resistance Army — despite its waning operational capacities — continue to threaten the safety of civilians, particularly in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The decision of the African Union Peace and Security Council to maintain the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army, pending the development of a strategy for the gradual withdrawal of the Initiative, would keep that armed group under pressure and weaken it considerably further.

The difficulties identified demonstrate the need for a participatory and inclusive regional cooperation strategy for all components of the populations concerned in order to provide an appropriate response to the challenges facing the region. In this regard, my country supports the efforts of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) for the advancement of peace and security, and welcomes the approval of a regional action plan to promote the participation of women in human rights and crisis resolution activities in the region, pursuant to resolution 1325 (2000) and in accordance with the recommendations of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

The partnership among regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations, in the framework of shared experiences and mutual support to address the challenges to the fight against instability, is proving to be of immense importance. The ECCAS-Economic Community of West African States joint summit on peace, security, stability and the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, held on 30 July, exemplifies such cooperation. We call on the international community to support the implementation of this summit's conclusions.

We stress the importance of collaboration between ECCAS and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community in the context of integration and regional cooperation, particularly on issues pertaining to peace and security, as well as the good cooperation between UNOCA and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, aimed at harmonizing the United Nations approach to peace and security in Africa in their respective subregions.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1065) provides useful information on the good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation activities of UNOCA, which has made progress in recent months in the area of peace, security and stability in Central Africa. They placed a particular focus on the prevention and mitigation of crises, support for the implementation of inclusive political reforms and the promotion of dialogue, thereby contributing to the peaceful outcome of elections, particularly in Sao Tome and Principe.

Likewise, the coordinating role played by UNOCA among the various United Nations agencies in the region is a key component of the synergy of United Nations actions in Central Africa. This is attested to by the first workshop attended by representatives of United Nations political components in the region, held on 5 and 6 November in Libreville under the auspices

of the Regional Office, in response to presidential statement S/PRST/2018/17, of 10 August.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its support for the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, whose mission of good offices and preventive diplomacy remains of utmost importance in the quest for peace, stability and socioeconomic development in the States of Central African. Côte d'Ivoire therefore extends its full support to the renewal of the UNOCA mandate until 31 August 2021.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8422

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8422nd meeting

Thursday, 13 December 2018, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Adom	(Côte d'Ivoire)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Blok
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Central African Republic

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Central African Republic

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Central African Republic to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/1016, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by France.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:
Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

Against:
None

Abstaining:
China and Russian Federation

The President (*spoke in French*): The draft resolution received 13 votes in favour, none against and two abstentions. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2448 (2018).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the adoption of resolution 2448 (2018), which renews the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for one year. In a context that is characterized by ongoing serious violence carried out by armed groups, as unfortunately evidenced by the current situation in Alindao, and with a heavy toll paid by the civilian population, humanitarian personnel and Blue Helmets, it was essential for the Security Council to reaffirm its support for MINUSCA and the Central African authorities.

In order to promote consensus, we have sought relentlessly, through extensive consultations and, of course, with respect for each other's positions, to strike a delicate balance among the various positions expressed during the negotiations. All the members of the Council actively participated in those negotiations and shared their sometimes diverging positions, which we have spared no effort to reconcile.

In that context, we solemnly call on everyone to actively and in good faith implement the resolution by putting the interests of the Central African people above our national interests. Action in favour of the Central African Republic can be achieved neither through a solitary and exclusive approach, nor by methods that ignore the solutions provided by our African partners themselves — first and foremost, the African Union — nor through initiatives that call into question the decisions of the Security Council.

To return to what should be at the heart of our common concerns, the MINUSCA mandate, I would like to underscore three points here with regard to the important resolution that we have just adopted.

First, the resolution maintains MINUSCA's robust format and mandate, which is key. MINUSCA, which operates in a difficult environment, has repeatedly demonstrated that it can act proactively and robustly, when necessary, to protect the civilian population — particularly the most vulnerable, namely, women and children — from the threat of armed groups. Now that MINUSCA has reached its full operational capacity with the arrival of the last contingents, which resulted from the increase in the troop ceiling authorized last year, we hope that MINUSCA will be able to pursue its efforts to enhance its mobility and improve its operational performance. It must also intensify the efforts already under way to prevent cases of sexual exploitation and abuse and ensure that they do not go unpunished. In that regard, I recall the importance of the Special Criminal Court and cooperation with the International Criminal Court.

Secondly, the resolution also reinforces MINUSCA's role, in accordance with the Secretary-General's recommendations, in supporting the political process in the Central African Republic, under the aegis

of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, which is also absolutely essential. The African Initiative is the only direct and inclusive dialogue process between the Central African Government and armed groups from which a comprehensive peace agreement can emerge.

In that context, we welcome the decision of the United Nations and the African Union to integrate MINUSCA into the African Initiative, as well as to include the Permanent Representative on the panel of facilitators. We also welcome the decision to support the African Initiative through a joint United Nations-African Union Special Envoy, and stress the importance of an early appointment at this crucial time to advance the peace and reconciliation process. Under the resolution, MINUSCA could also strengthen its substantive support for and mediation role in the African Initiative, in addition to the support it already provides in the technical, logistical and security areas. Its role as coordinator of international support for the African Initiative will also be bolstered.

Thirdly and lastly, the resolution authorizes additional support from MINUSCA to the Central African authorities for the extension of the State's authority throughout Central African territory. I am thinking in particular of the logistical support, albeit limited, that MINUSCA will be able to provide to the Central African armed forces trained or certified by the European Union Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic, as well as the internal security forces, in order to allow them to gradually redeploy within the Central African territory and conduct joint operations to ensure the safety of local populations. Negotiations on that point have been difficult. That is a fact, and expectations should not be unrealistic. MINUSCA is already working with armed forces of the Central African Republic who have either been trained or certified by EUTM RCA and could therefore continue to do so by adding logistical support to the extent that its resources permit and within its areas of deployment.

France is well aware of the commitment and sacrifices that MINUSCA and its civilian, police and military staff are making in order to promote peace in the Central African Republic, and will continue to give them its firm support both on the ground and here in New York. We will also continue to give our full support to President Touadera and the people of the Central African Republic, who have suffered far too long in this crisis. I want to say once again that France's motive is its desire to support the people of the Central African Republic, and that motive should guide the action and commitment of every Council member.

The President (*spoke in French*): I would like to welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Stef Blok, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, and to give him the floor.

Mr. Blok (Netherlands): As we gather in this Chamber this afternoon, more than half of the people of the Central African Republic are fleeing the ongoing violence there. The attacks on civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian workers continue, despite the peace process led by the African Union Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. It is clear that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) has a vital role to play to support and protect the people of the Central African Republic. We therefore thank France for its work and leadership in facilitating the discussion on MINUSCA's mandate by making extensive efforts to find a compromise among all members of the Council.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the mandate's renewal for a period of one year. We are pleased that the Mission's role in the political process and the mandate for the protection of civilians have been significantly strengthened by comparison to last year's mandate. We are also satisfied with MINUSCA's newly assigned task extending limited logistical support to the country's armed forces that have been trained by the European Union Training Mission in the Central African Republic, which is essential to strengthening the State's authority. MINUSCA also has an important role in coordinating international security-sector reform initiatives, which should be undertaken transparently and coherently. For these reasons, we regret that the mandate was not adopted unanimously. We urge all Council members to work to restore unity in their support to the people of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): The United States strongly supports the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and is pleased to have voted for this mandate renewal. We note that it will be difficult for the Council and MINUSCA to assist the Government of the Central African Republic in making peace with armed groups, re-establishing

Government control over its entire territory and laying the groundwork for peace and prosperity for all the citizens of the Central African Republic unless there is total unity, transparency and coordination among key actors, including the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

We are deeply concerned about the violence in Bangui, Bambari and Alindao, and believe that the fighting and the actions against civilians demonstrate the importance of ensuring that the Central African authorities coordinate with MINUSCA before redeploying security forces, as authorized in this mandate. We are concerned about the possibility the Central African military might be moving to zones that were not previously agreed on with the United Nations. We will continue to urge for the establishment of a national inspection protocol for all weapon donations to the Government of the Central African Republic. We commend all the donors providing that assistance, and we want to reaffirm our commitment to achieving the highest possible standards of transparency in coordinating with the Government and other partners on military assistance, training and donations. In some cases, the distinction between activities that represent official Government assistance and those that represent private commercial activities, unrelated to donor coordination, has been unclear.

Assisting the Government of the Central African Republic is not a competition. In helping one of the world's poorest countries emerge from more than a decade of conflict to pursue peace and development, there can be no room for jealousy. We must coordinate closely to ensure that our combined assistance and related activities help to achieve the Security Council's objectives in support of the Central African Republic's territorial integrity.

As is authorized in this mandate, we urge for more rapid progress on the African Union Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, and we encourage all Member States to embrace transparency and full cooperation with the Government of the Central African Republic, the AU, ECCAS and MINUSCA in support of a political resolution to the violence.

Finally, we note that resolution 2448 (2018) contains references to the International Criminal Court (ICC), and in that connection we want to refer to the United States policy on the ICC, as announced by the White House on 10 September. In particular, the United States reiterates its continuing and long-standing principled objection to any assertion of ICC jurisdiction over nationals of States that are not parties to the Rome Statute, including the United States and Israel, without a Security Council referral or the consent of such a State. We also want to reiterate our serious and fundamental concerns about the ICC Prosecutor's proposed investigation of United States personnel in the context of the conflict in Afghanistan. As today's resolution recalls, the Central African Republic is a State party to the Rome Statute and has consented to the ICC's exercise of jurisdiction in its territory. The United States remains a leader in the fight to end impunity and continues to support justice and accountability for international crimes, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. We respect the decision of the nations that have chosen to join the ICC, and in turn we expect that our decision not to join and not to place our citizens under the ICC's jurisdiction will also be respected.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation was unable to support resolution 2448 (2018), proposed by our French colleagues to extend the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. We abstained not because we do not support the Mission or disagree with anything to do with it. On the contrary, we are grateful for its activities and the dedication of its peacekeepers. The reason is the manner in which the work on the text was done, especially in the final stages, and it leads us to wonder once again about the true reasons for the behaviour of the authors of the resolution, who, unlike us, are apparently continuing to play a zero-sum game in Africa. Furthermore, behind all of this we get a glimpse of an attitude that has persisted for decades to the independence that African countries have achieved through their struggles for national liberation and that treats their lands like some kind of patrimony or their own preserve in a vicious cycle where metropolis meets colony.

Throughout all the rounds of expert consultations, we asked that our concerns be heard and that the text reflect a number of points of principle, aimed chiefly at increasing the transparency of the interactions with Bangui's international partners, something that Western delegations are constantly calling for, and a recognition of the important role of regional actors in the process of

achieving a settlement in the Central African Republic. Once again, unfortunately, our desire for mutually respectful work in the Council was repudiated. Our arguments during the work on the resolution were ignored. Moreover, we detect in the resolution's content the penholders' clear overstepping of their authority to assert a national agenda or reflect the priorities of their closest partners. There was basically no effort to seek compromises or reach a consensus. We were offered what were termed compromise solutions that took no account of our legitimate demands, and we were told that this was as far as the penholders could go, it was their maximum. What I want to know is who decides what the maximum is. Their maximum is not even our minimum. Practically speaking, we were faced with a fact and, not for the first time, were told to take it or leave it, to go along with the situation as presented in the name of preserving the unity of the Security Council.

It is not the first time that we have encountered this in the Council or said that it is time that this culture of discourse, or rather the lack thereof, must come to an end. The way the draft was agreed on once again emphasized how essential it is that we change the current system of penholdership for various items on the Security Council's agenda, which has been usurped by the Western troika.

The authors of the document flatly refused to take into account a number of our principled political concerns. The result was that it did not reflect the important concept welcoming peace initiatives that align with and contribute to achieving the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. Nor did we hear any convincing or clear reasons why the French delegation was categorically opposed to our incidentally very generalized proposed wording. But we certainly do remember that on 14 November, when consensus on a draft resolution was not reached, it was immediately taken off the table at the request of one delegation. For some reason we did not see Paris take a similarly careful approach to our position.

The suggestion that the meeting in Khartoum that for the first time in a long time brought the leaders of the Central African Republic opposition groups together around the same negotiation table was not aligned with the African Initiative is totally wrong. We heard the same kind of excuses in 2015 when France prevented similar efforts to achieve peace by rejecting the Nairobi agreement between the main opposition groups headed by François Bozizé and Michel Djotodia on the invented pretext that it was not in line with the previous agreements. Since then we have all seen that the security situation in the Central African Republic is deteriorating, the socioeconomic situation is getting worse and the human suffering is continuing. In that connection, we would specifically like to point out that we have taken note of the French delegation's promise to reflect the importance of the Khartoum process in future Security Council documents. We will be watching attentively to see that promise fulfilled.

Another subject not reflected in the resolution was the major contribution that has been made to training the Central African armed forces by the Russian instructors who are in the Central African Republic at the invitation of its leaders and are working to improve the armed forces' real battle readiness. Instead, the penholders bent over backwards to puff up the role of the European Union Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic, which as the Europeans themselves admit is focused on human rights training for the military, which is not exactly going to help it ensure security and control throughout the country.

In our view, what is extremely revealing is the evolving story of the approval in the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) of the second batch of Russian weapons sent free of charge to the Central African Republic in response to Bangui's official request. There is supposed to be a consensus on the importance of strengthening the national security sector, and we have responded to all of the questions. But we are now being told that the Central African Republic does not have the proper storage facilities. And yet for a subsequent delivery of 1,400 submachine guns from the French — which on top of that are not from their own stores but seized from smugglers in murky circumstances — storage facilities were suddenly found. Where is the logic in that? Or is it another infamous example of double standards? As this shows, guided by their own narrow self-interests, the countries of the West are putting obstacles in the way of rebuilding battle-ready forces in the Central African Republic and restoring the Government's legitimate authority throughout the country, despite all their assertions to the contrary.

I will have to disappoint those who are getting ready to blame Russia for all of the world's deadly sins. Incidentally, we were surprised to learn from the BBC today — Council members can find it on the Internet

themselves — about a statement by United States National Security Adviser John Bolton on Russia and China's role in Africa. The same claims that he made about our countries could just as well be made about the United States. In fact, that was what the reporter describing the situation was saying. It can be found on the BBC's website.

The fact is that the international community's unSited support for stabilizing the Central African Republic has not vanished, and our understanding of the importance of extending the mandate of the peacekeeping mission in that country is still there. But we cannot accept it when in the guise of so-called good intentions with regard to consolidating support for Bangui, in practice the resolution's penholders plant the idea about the exceptional nature of their own efforts.

We hope that reason will ultimately prevail in the interests of the people of the Central African Republic. Russia will continue its active and peaceful work to stabilize the situation and establish peace in the Central African Republic, and we are ready to engage in respectful, constructive collaboration with anyone so inclined. There is room for everyone who wants to help the Central African Republic.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Let me take this opportunity to thank France for its efforts in coordinating the drafting of resolution 2448 (2018). Poland voted in favour of it, and we regret that we were unable to reach consensus on it. In our opinion, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic is a crucial element in the Council's efforts to support peace in the Central African Republic, and the issue of extending the mandate of the Mission for another year is extremely important both for the country and the whole Central African region. In that context, it is critical to maintain a constructive position in the Council on the issue in order to help to ensure overall stability in the Central African Republic, especially in the context of the elections planned for 2020 and 2021. It is especially important right now to send a clear message to the Government and the people of the Central African Republic that the Security Council is united in supporting their aspirations for stability and prosperity.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic has played an important role in maintaining peace and stability in the Central African Republic, and China supports the extension of its mandate. Meanwhile, the efforts of the relevant parties within the international community to achieve peace and security in the Central African Republic should be recognized and positively acknowledged. The legitimate concerns of all parties, particularly the Central African Republic, should be fully heeded and taken seriously by the penholders. Resolution 2448 (2018) should serve to foster Council consensus, maintain Council unity and send a positive signal from the international community in support of the Government of the Central African Republic. Only in doing so can we contribute to lasting peace and stability in the Central African Republic. With that in mind, China abstained in the voting on the draft resolution just adopted.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): The Central African Republic is now taking important steps to advance the peace process under the African Union-led African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. In parallel, its national security forces are improving their capabilities in spite of the very volatile and fragile situation in the country, as the recent attacks on civilians in Alindao and Batangafo demonstrated. I want to emphasize the critical role played by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in securing stability and advancing the peace process, as well as in supporting the protection of civilians and fighting sexual and gender-based violence. We would like to thank France for its work on resolution 2248 (2018). I want to briefly highlight three specific areas where the mandate of MINUSCA has been strengthened.

The first is the protection of civilians, including prevention and early warning. The second is MINUSCA's political role in supporting the peace process, and the third is MINUSCA's ability to provide logistical and technical support to the Central African armed forces. I also want to emphasize that the resolution recognizes the adverse effects of climate change on the stability of the Central African region and stresses the need for adequate risk assessments and long-term strategies by the United Nations and Governments of the region. The mandate was not adopted by consensus, but we urge all Council members to unite in their support to the Central African Republic and to MINUSCA, and we know that they will.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Côte d Ivoire and on behalf of the three African countries that are members of the Security Council.

The delegations of Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire welcome the adoption of resolution 2448 (2018), renewing the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for an additional year. The three African members of the Council voted in favour of the text, which represents the clear support of the international community to the peace efforts of the people of the Central African Republic. We regret, however, that the one-month postponement of the adoption of the resolution did not allow us to smooth out the difficulties and create the spirit of compromise needed to reach consensus on the text, which would have fully ensured the legitimacy of MINUSCA's presence in the Central African Republic.

In any event, the three African Council members wish to stress that our decisions must be guided solely by the best interests of the Central African Republic and its people, who have suffered too much from the persistent crisis in their country. We are convinced that the renewal of MINUSCA's robust mandate will enable the Mission to carry out its priority tasks of protecting civilians, supporting the political peace process and supporting the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Central Africans in need.

Through the new resolution, the Council also reaffirms its support for the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. It reinforces MINUSCA's role in leading the Initiative with a view to fostering direct and inclusive dialogue among the various actors. The Council also supports the participation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Initiative's panel of facilitators, thereby demonstrating his interest in the political process, which is undoubtedly the appropriate framework for finding a lasting solution to the crisis in the Central African Republic.

In addition, the three African Council members welcome the strengthening of MINUSCA's support to the Central African authorities in the context of the extension of State authority, the deployment of security forces and the preservation of the country's territorial integrity. There is no doubt that this support is an essential tool in addressing the ongoing political, security and humanitarian challenges to the Central African Republic.

Finally, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire express their support for the Government of the Central African Republic and encourage it and all stakeholders to collaborate with the United Nations system, including MINUSCA, in their efforts to resolve the crisis with a view to restoring peace and lasting stability to this brotherly country.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Central African Republic.

Ms. Kpongo (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on Côte d'Ivoire's assumption of the Council presidency this month and thank you for organizing this meeting with a view to adopting resolution 2448 (2018), renewing the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

I express my heartfelt gratitude to all members of the Security Council for their support in adopting the resolution and the acute sense of responsibility that accompanied their long consultations. I say this because while we dither at the United Nations in general, and in the Security Council in particular, the reality on the ground is extremely serious and requires our concerted attention.

As we noted on 23 October (see S/PV.8378) when the Secretary-General presented his report (S/2018/922) on the situation in the Central African Republic, the situation remains fragile due to clashes among armed groups, in particular ex-Séléka and anti-balaka factions. Civilians, humanitarian workers and international forces are caught up as targets in the spiral of this violence. Despite calls for armed groups to lay down their weapons and engage in the peace process, they are responding with demonstrations of force, as we witnessed in Ndélé in recent weeks.

I stress the relevance of paragraph 66 of the report, which stresses the need to exert credible, adequate and sustained military pressure to prevent any further strengthening or expansion of the armed groups. Unfortunately, we are now witnessing that sad reality. Indeed, the latest unfortunate events in Batangafo, Bambari, and especially in Alindao on 15 November

and in Ippy on 4 December, where displaced person sites were the targets of senseless, deadly attacks, sufficiently demonstrate some of the limitations of MINUSCA.

The persistence of conflicts has forced more than 1 million Central Africans to leave their homes due to arson, the demolition of their homes or as a preventive measure. As of 30 September, the Commission on Population Movement reported 643,396 internally displaced persons, while the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported 573,242 refugees in neighbouring countries. More than half of the displaced are children. In 2018, an increasing number of unaccompanied and separated children — approximately 704 — were identified after a forced displacement. The hardest hit categories of populations are displaced persons, host families and people living in conflict areas.

The Central African Republic continues to be caught up in a cycle of violence that has spread to various parts of the country, including areas that were previously considered relatively stable. Abuses and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law continue to be perpetrated in a context of impunity, exacerbating tensions in several parts of the country. That has led to increasing humanitarian needs and raised fears that the country may be plunging further into humanitarian crisis. Civilians, particularly women and children, continue to suffer the consequences of the conflict, are increasingly exposed to safety risks and have ever more pressing humanitarian needs. Today, one in five people is a displaced person or refugee as a result of abuses by armed groups.

The crisis is first and foremost one of protection and requires all parties to commit to the protection of civilians. Women and children continue to bear the brunt of the violence. A growing number of women have been victims of violence.

In view of the security challenges facing the country, it is crucial to seriously consider the deployment of the Forces armées centrafricaines (FACA), which could reduce the bellicose fervour of the armed groups where they are located. The decrease in security breaches in Bangui, Bangassou, Paoua and several prefectures in the west are due to the sizeable joint deployment of FACA and MINUSCA troops. The Central African Government calls on the Security Council to authorize MINUSCA to provide logistical support for the redeployment of the FACA to garrisons throughout the country.

It should be noted that to date, in addition to the training of personnel by the European Union Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM RCA), some neighbouring countries — including Rwanda, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo — also provide training. We also note that, at the bilateral level, the Russian Federation has supported our forces in by providing weaponry and combat training to elements previously trained by EUTM RCA. Those troops are subsequently redeployed to the field jointly with MINUSCA. The presence of the Forces armées centrafricaines, equipped with their working tools throughout the country, is a guarantee of security for the civilian population, a defender of the decentralized services of the State and an important factor that can contribute to the country's economic and social development.

In addition to the renewing Mission's primary mandate, which focuses on certain priority tasks, including support for the political and reconciliation process and the protection of civilians, resolution 2448 (2018) confers on the Mission other equally important tasks, such as involvement in the upcoming electoral process, its integrated support for the African Initiative and the inclusion of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General as a full member of the panel of facilitators.

We warmly welcome those initiatives, and in that context it is important to ensure that MINUSCA is provided with the resources necessary to properly fulfil its new mandate, which is a responsibility that falls on all members of the Security Council and the United Nations. For its part, the Government of the Central African Republic reiterates its strong and determined support for the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, under the leadership of the African Union. The Government fully appreciates the proposal to appoint a joint United Nations-African Union Special Envoy.

I conclude by underlining our gratitude for the mobilization of the Council and the entire international community on behalf of MINUSCA and lasting peace in the Central African Republic. We must strengthen the progress made in several areas in order to advance towards finding a solution to the crisis. We reiterate our

sincere thanks for the Council's unwavering support for President Touadera in his quest to turn the Central African Republic into a country where life is good. We continue to acknowledge the troop-contributing countries whose nationals have lost their lives in the service of the United Nations for the protection of the Central African population. We will always carry them in our hearts.

The meeting rose at 3.55 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8423

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8423rd meeting

Thursday, 13 December 2018, 4 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Adom	(Côte d'Ivoire)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Blok
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Hunter

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/1104)

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18-43755 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 4 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/1104)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/1110, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Kuwait and Sweden.

I draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2018/1104, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018).

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it.

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Over the past two weeks, Sweden and Kuwait, as penholders for the humanitarian aspect of the Council's work on Syria, have conducted broad consultations with members of the Security Council and other relevant parties in order to renew the resolution on humanitarian access to Syria, including the fundamental provisions of resolution 2165 (2014). Those negotiations and consultations have been fruitful and helpful. We thank all Council members for their constructive engagement in the consultations. Consequently, Sweden and Kuwait have presented to the Council what they believe to be a purely humanitarian and balanced draft resolution, which renews cross-border humanitarian operations for 12 months, in line with the Secretary-General's recommendation.

The cross-border assistance authorized by the Security Council remains a vital part of the humanitarian response. In November alone, life-saving cross-border humanitarian assistance was provided to more than 600,000 people, including food assistance to nearly 500,000. The number of those who are still in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria is 13 million, which is a very significant number.

The renewal of the resolution would allow the Security Council to continue to help ease the human suffering of the people and ensure delivery by the shortest route to humanitarian assistance to those in Syria who need it. Such cross-border humanitarian assistance continues to complement other mechanisms of humanitarian response in Syria, where millions of people depend on cross-border humanitarian assistance to survive. That is why we call on all Council members to support the draft resolution and vote in favour of it.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Against

None

Abstaining

China, Russian Federation

The President (*spoke in French*): The draft resolution received 13 votes in favour, none against and 2 abstentions. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2449 (2018).

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: Let me begin today by thanking Council members for their decision just now to adopt resolution 2449 (2018). Cross-border aid provides a critical lifeline to millions of Syrians who cannot be

supported through any other means. The Council has done its part; we will now do ours to sustain aid in a way that is as effective and accountable as possible.

The situation in the north-west of Syria, where some 3 million people remain dependent on humanitarian cross-border operations, is very challenging. While a pause in air strikes has had a meaningful impact on the lives of people there, shelling and fighting in the areas in and around the demilitarized zone continue to result in civilian death and injury and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. In late November, a mortar struck a primary school in Jarjanaz town just as students were leaving, killing four boys and two girls and injuring ten other children. Insecurity continues and incidents affecting civilians continue to be reported every day. The recent hostilities have reportedly forced nearly 15,000 people to flee their homes for neighbouring villages, with many people living in the open, without adequate shelter, during the cold winter months. They join the many thousands already living in tents or under plastic sheeting.

The United Nations and non-governmental organizations continue to respond to ensure that those in need get help, but fighting and displacement make the situation more difficult and the population more vulnerable. Idlib remains on the edge of a humanitarian disaster. Should there be a further escalation of violence, the needs would quickly overwhelm the ability of humanitarian agencies to respond. The parties to the conflict must take care to spare the civilian population, while at the same time taking all possible measures to see that the violence in Idlib ends and that the humanitarian catastrophe the Secretary-General has warned of does not come to pass.

Humanitarian organizations estimate that up to 6,000 people remain trapped in areas under the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, east of the Euphrates, in Deir ez-Zor governorate. Civilians continue to suffer, as a result of both ground fighting and air strikes. On 29 November, air strikes reportedly hit a field hospital in the area, killing and injuring scores of civilians, including women, children and medical staff. Freedom of movement is heavily restricted. Some 9,000 people have been able to flee since September, but they continue to find themselves in harm's way, living in difficult conditions and with extremely limited access to basic assistance and services.

The most recent aid to reach displaced people in the area was in October. The most recent humanitarian mission to the area had to turn back when its vehicles came under attack and one aid worker was shot. After receiving treatment, he is now in stable condition, but the civilians in the area continue to suffer without the basic support that they need. I also remain very concerned about the more than 40,000 people in Rukban, where we continue to receive reports of civilian suffering and death.

The deployment of our convoy in early November has shown that where there is a political will, humanitarian organizations can mobilize quickly and provide help to those in need. I once again thank all who were involved in that. We need to build on that first delivery with a second convoy later this month to provide food, water, hygiene and sanitation support, and medical and nutrition items, as well as blankets, mattresses and other essential non-food items to help protect people during the winter. A second convoy will also allow us to carry out further vaccinations and speak to people about their plans as we look towards more sustainable solutions.

I want to assure the Council that the first delivery was effective. We monitored the delivery of aid inside the camp for three days. We will make additional efforts to strengthen the monitoring of the distribution in the next convoy. We will send a bigger team, and we plan to accompany the assistance from the offloading point to the distribution points inside the makeshift settlement to oversee the actual distributions and to conduct post-distribution monitoring. My message to all concerned parties is therefore simple. I ask them to provide the authorizations, facilitation letters and all the necessary security guarantees for the convoy to proceed without delay or impediment.

Sustaining and scaling up the response is also critical in other parts of the country, including in areas under the control of the Government, where we now estimate that 8.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. From January to September, humanitarian organizations operating from inside Syria have been reaching an average of 3.2 million people every month. A key priority has been addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in locations that have seen shifts in control. Some 1.6 million people live in areas that have changed control since the beginning of the year. Some areas have suffered for years under siege, have been impacted by intense military activity prior

to changing control or have seen no resumption of basic services since changing control. Up to one-third of those people are living in areas categorized by the United Nations as hard-to-reach, where the United Nations and its partners do not have a sustained presence and as a result, humanitarian needs are particularly severe. Aid has reached 40 per cent of those locations, including through a blanket agreement for access to northern rural Homs and southern Hama. However, sustained access to too many areas remains limited and some areas are still not accessible at all.

Improving our response is not only about reaching more people, although that is part of it. We are also increasingly focused on further improving the quality of our access and programming. What do we mean by quality in humanitarian assistance? First, assistance must be based on an assessment of needs. Secondly, it means being able to monitor and evaluate our impact, including by directly engaging with the people we are trying to help. Thirdly, it involves ensuring protection for the most vulnerable and sustaining our reach month after month, based on the needs identified. We are making progress in many of those areas. The United Nations is reaching many places, with more than 550 missions over the past three months to assess, deliver or monitor the delivery of assistance. We are also working on expanding our field presence in governorates outside Damascus to enhance our ability to engage with communities, assess needs, deliver assistance and monitor impact. We continue to engage with all parties to the conflict, including the Government of Syria, at multiple levels to negotiate access and ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those most in need. I will report to the Council on our progress in improving access in the months ahead.

Let me conclude by recalling the five requests I made to the Council two months ago (see S/PV.8384). The full implementation of those requests will remain an important focus of our work as we move into 2019, recognizing that other issues may also arise as the situation evolves.

First, with the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018), important progress has been made, but we must see access continue without impediment. Secondly, while we have seen the continued implementation of the agreement between Russia and Turkey in the north-west, it is critical that it be sustained with respect for civilians and civilian infrastructure, and that there be an end to the current hostilities. A full military onslaught on Idlib and the surrounding areas must be avoided at all costs. Thirdly, there must be support to ensure that approval for the next humanitarian convoy to Rukban is immediately granted and that secure access is provided to the makeshift settlement. Fourthly, we must be able to enjoy the Council's ongoing support so we can further build on our efforts to ensure quality access, through which we can carry out additional needs assessments, deliver to all areas where needs are most severe, and monitor the impact of our interventions. Fifthly, we must provide financing for our current humanitarian response plan. Donors have provided more than $2.1 billion this year, but the plan remains only two-thirds funded.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I will say a few words on behalf of the co-penholders, Sweden and Kuwait, and follow up with a few remarks in my national capacity as the representative of Sweden.

With the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018) today, the Security Council has upheld its obligation to millions of people in Syria. On behalf of the co-penholders, Kuwait and Sweden, I strongly welcome this decision. The renewal of the modalities of resolution 2165 (2015) for an additional 12 months will continue to save lives and alleviate suffering every day in Syria. The United Nations does not have an alternative route for reaching those people in need. It is an existential lifeline.

While the situation on the ground has changed much over the past year, the humanitarian needs unfortunately remain enormous. There are millions of people who still depend on humanitarian assistance. This resolution is about ensuring that they receive assistance through the most direct routes and that the relief reaches as many people as possible throughout the country. The United Nations cross-border operations, based on resolution 2165 (2015), are necessary as long as the humanitarian needs remain and humanitarian access from within the country is impeded.

As a co-penholder together with Kuwait, our compass has been defined by the humanitarian imperative to act. Over the past weeks, we have consulted all members of the Council and other stakeholders, including Syria and the neighbouring

countries. We have been committed to facilitating a fair, impartial and transparent negotiations process. It is well known that there are different perspectives on the Syrian conflict in the Council and that discussions can sometimes be heated. The adoption of today's resolution demonstrates, however, that in the face of urgent needs Council members can come together to shoulder a collective responsibility.

On behalf of the co-penholders, I would like to thank the representatives of all delegations for their constructive engagement during the negotiations on resolution 2449 (2018). I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and his team here in New York for their support. Most important, I would like to pay tribute to the staff of the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners for their tireless efforts to help the Syrian people.

At this point, I would like to say a few words in my capacity as the representative of Sweden. The Charter of the United Nations places the people at the forefront, but, far too often, the people are forgotten or neglected during our deliberations in the Council. Our meetings on the humanitarian situation in Syria serve as a reminder that the Syrian conflict needs to be first and foremost about the Syrian people. The conflict in Syria has led to a humanitarian disaster, with consequences far beyond Syria's borders. As the conflict enters its eighth winter, 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and more than 5 million of them are children. Six million people are displaced within Syria, many of whom have been forced to flee more than once, and a further 5 million have fled to neighbouring countries. Without a doubt, a very heavy responsibility for this disaster inevitably rests with the Government of Syria — something that the international community will not forget.

For years, the Council has dealt with one crisis after another in Syria — each a humanitarian catastrophe in its own right. The conflict has been characterized throughout by a blatant disregard for human dignity. Homs, Aleppo and eastern Ghouta will not be forgotten. Idlib, where 3 million civilians are trapped with no safe place to flee, could yet be added to that list. It is key to uphold the fragile ceasefire in Idlib, where a military offensive would most likely result in a new humanitarian disaster of unimaginable proportions. We urge the Astana guarantors — Russia, Turkey and Iran — to ensure that the ceasefire is upheld and that civilians are protected.

The Council has on numerous occasions called on the parties — in particular the Syrian authorities — to allow safe, sustained and unhindered humanitarian access. Yet substantial and arbitrary obstacles remain, which are hindering the delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout Syria. That includes areas that have recently been retaken by Government forces and their allies. Even if an occasional humanitarian convoy is allowed to reach those most in need, the fact is that the humanitarian actors do not have the access that the Council has repeatedly demanded.

Syria is a clear case in point in which the international legal order — built over decades to protect the most vulnerable in times of conflict — has come under threat. We have witnessed frequent violations of the rules and principles of international humanitarian law. We have witnessed indiscriminate attacks in densely populated areas. We have witnessed the deliberate targeting of schools and hospitals, as well as attacks on humanitarian workers and medical personnel. And we have witnessed, over and over again, the refusal to grant humanitarian access to people in need of assistance. The integrity of the international legal order depends on our continuing to seek ways to ensure that those responsible for those crimes are brought to justice and held accountable.

During its two years on the Council, Sweden has repeatedly underlined the importance of upholding international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law, whether in Syria, Yemen or South Sudan. Upholding the international rules-based order is pivotal both to preventing and terminating conflict. The rules and principles of international humanitarian law aim to limit the suffering and effects of war. We call on all parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations to ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian and medical personnel, and to respect and protect civilian objects, hospitals and medical facilities.

When taking up the co-penholdership for Syria and the humanitarian track, Sweden clearly stated that its commitment would be to the Syrian people and humanitarian principles. We have sought to depoliticize humanitarian matters and focus on the humanitarian imperative to act. Nevertheless, we will leave the Council with a strong sense of frustration. We fully understand those who claim that the international community has time and time again failed the Syrian people. Yet, today's adoption of resolution 2449 (2018)

proves that when there is political will, the Security Council can make a real difference on the ground for millions of people.

I wish to pay tribute to Kuwait, our co-penholder, for its excellent cooperation and, of course, to Egypt and Japan, with whom we shared penholdership in 2017. I take this opportunity to affirm Sweden's full commitment to continuing its strong and whole-hearted engagement to alleviate the humanitarian suffering in Syria and our support for neighbouring countries affected by the crisis. The humanitarian community has undertaken a Herculean task and we commend the courageous and selfless efforts of all humanitarian workers on the ground. Too many have paid with their lives throughout the conflict. The humanitarian appeal for Syria remains significantly underfunded, as we have just heard. This year alone, Sweden has contributed more than $50 million to the response in Syria. We must all do our share in making sure that the humanitarian agencies can continue to carry out their critical work to help the Syrian people.

Finally, we express our full support for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and its assessment that the conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees are not yet in place. It falls to the Syrian authorities to ensure that those conditions are created. We also reiterate our concern that the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015), which must be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led, including the full and effective representation of women. That is the only path to sustainable peace and stability. We look forward to hearing from Mr. Staffan de Mistura on that point next week.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I welcome the presence among us of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. We also thank the Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, for his valuable briefing on the latest developments concerning the humanitarian situation in Syria.

We fully associate ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Sweden, which was also made on our behalf, and I wish to make a few additional remarks in our national capacity.

We reiterate our support for all humanitarian actors and medical staff on the ground and commend their efforts to reduce the humanitarian suffering in Syria.

The Council has just adopted resolution 2449 (2018), which renews the mandate of the mechanism to deliver cross-border humanitarian aid for an additional year. The resolution is the result of weeks of discussions and consultations, during which we listened to the opinions of all members of the Council and relevant parties. We thank all States that voted in favour of the resolution.

The adoption of this humanitarian resolution represents an extremely important step in ensuring the direct delivery of humanitarian aid to millions of Syrians in need. The Council has therefore responded to the international community's calls by renewing this mechanism, which is a clear signal that the international community attaches great importance to the swift and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need.

Regrettably, this year has seen an increase in the humanitarian suffering in Syria. The conflict continues, threatening regional and international peace and security, while the Council remains unable to resolve the crisis. We are concerned by the recent escalation of the situation in various parts of the country, including Deir ez-Zor, Idlib and Aleppo. The current security situation in Syria demonstrates that it is still fragile and could lead to a military escalation, in particular in Idlib, where some 3 million people live. In that regard, we reaffirm the importance of maintaining the agreement reached between Russia and Turkey on Idlib in order to prevent a further humanitarian catastrophe there.

We also reaffirm that all parties must honour their commitments under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We reiterate the importance of holding accountable all those who have committed violations of international law and international humanitarian law. We must also ensure the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons, according to international criteria. The Council must therefore redouble its efforts and work collectively in order to resolve the crisis. The humanitarian situation will keep deteriorating if a political solution of the Syrian crisis is not reached pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

In conclusion, since this meeting is the last scheduled on the humanitarian situation in Syria for

this year, I take this opportunity to thank the delegation of Sweden, especially Ambassador Olof Skoog and his team, for their cooperation on the humanitarian file of a dear Arab State that should enjoy security and stability. We commend the marvellous performance of the delegation of Sweden, which was admired by everyone in the Council. After we closely worked with it on this and other dossiers, I can honestly say that the delegation of Sweden has enjoyed the great confidence of all members of the Council because of its demonstrated professionalism, credibility and integrity in upholding and staunchly defending the Charter of the United Nations and international law. We therefore again congratulate the Ambassador and the delegation of Sweden on their efforts and achievements, and look forward to working with the delegations of Germany and Belgium on the Syrian humanitarian dossier starting in January 2019.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Mr. Blok (Netherlands): I would like to thank Mr. Lowcock for his sobering briefing.

In March, I had the honour to speak in this Chamber for the first time (see S/PV.8217). The same topic was on the agenda: the humanitarian crisis in Syria. I am addressing the Security Council today in the knowledge that this situation will remain on the agenda for the foreseeable future. Millions of Syrians continue to suffer. Back in March, the Syrian regime and their allies were bombing civilians in eastern Ghouta. The delivery of humanitarian aid was obstructed and long-established norms of international humanitarian law were gravely violated.

Today, nine months later, the air strikes on eastern Ghouta have stopped. But as we all know, that did not mean an end to the horror for Syrians. Humanitarian workers continue to have very limited access. Many refugees and internally displaced persons cannot go back; they fear for their safety. The conditions set for their safe return by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have not been met.

After years of terror and starvation, children, women and men in former opposition-held territory still lack access to food, medical care and schooling. Access to those basic necessities is being blocked. Furthermore, those people now live in fear of retribution, persecution and detention by Al-Assad's security services. There is a complete lack of security. After seven years of war, more than 6 million Syrians are internally displaced, including the incredible number of 2.5 million children. After seven years of war, those people should be free to choose to go back to their homes. Instead, they are faced with discriminatory legislation that undermines their housing, land and property rights. After seven years of war, countless Syrians have had no news of the whereabouts of their loved ones. Is there still hope, or were their family members, neighbours and friends arrested, detained and tortured — or even killed — in regime-run prisons?

We have held a seat on the Security Council for one year. Many times, the situation in Syria has been on the agenda. Many times, progress has been blocked by the lack of implementation of Security Council resolutions. For how many more years will Syria remain on the agenda of the Security Council? For how many more years should we allow the Syrian regime's systematic human rights abuse and institutionalized violence to continue? It is clear that the situation must not be allowed to continue. Syrians are in dire need of progress. There are four points I would like to make.

First, humanitarian actors should have unimpeded access to all civilians in need, all over Syria. I that regard, I welcome the renewal of the mandate of the cross-border aid mechanism for 12 months so that no one is left behind. I commend Sweden and Kuwait, as co-penholders, for their excellent work. It is also imperative that access from within Syria to areas under control of the regime be granted without delay.

Secondly, we need a sustainable solution for the fragile ceasefire in Idlib. I call on all parties involved to refrain from hostilities, which would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe with grave international implications.

Thirdly, with the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNHCR we have to uncover the fate of all those Syrians who have disappeared, list the names of those detained and investigate and prosecute human rights violators.

Finally, we fully support the Special Envoy's convening of a constitutional committee before the end of the year. The United Nations has a central role to play in that process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Sochi communiqué. Let me also underline that the European Union will not begin development and

reconstruction efforts before a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is firmly under way. For my Government, it is inconceivable to finance a regime responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Let me say something about those crimes. Some of the darkest crimes of modern time have taken place during the Syrian conflict — and are still taking place. There will be no stability until the perpetrators of those crimes are brought to justice. To me it is clear that accountability is about upholding our human dignity, but what we see is impunity becoming the new normal. That must end. We must not allow this immense human tragedy to become a travesty of international law. It would be a terrible crisis of credibility for the international community. The perpetrators of shocking crimes, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and Al-Qaida, will be found.

I urge all States to increase their support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria. Its aim is simple and clear: to ensure that information about serious crimes is collected, analysed and preserved for the future. I call on all Council members to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Finally, ISIS fighters have committed gruesome crimes that, in the case of the crimes against Yazidis, may amount to genocide. I call on all members of the Council to work together to achieve recognition by the Council of those grave crimes, including genocide, so that we can make sure such heinous crimes are not repeated.

This will be the last time I speak about Syria here, but I am sure that I will not be the last person to speak about Syria. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to fight for justice, peace and accountability for Syria and others — at the Council, in The Hague and beyond.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands will soon end its term on the Security Council. On a more personal note, if I may, it has been an honour to speak on behalf of my country in this seat and in this Chamber. I know that discussions, debates and decisions in the Council are not always easy. However, that is no reason to despair. According to the writings of Tolstoy, for every situation, no matter how difficult, there will be a solution. It all comes down to making a decision.

Mr. Delattre (*spoke in French*): First and foremost, on behalf of France, I would like to welcome the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018). This resolution is vital, in the literal sense of the word, as cross-border humanitarian assistance is a matter of life or death for millions of Syrians. We are pleased by the spirit of responsibility within the Security Council, which has served to give priority to the humanitarian imperative over political considerations. On behalf of France as well, I would like to express our profound thanks to the Permanent Missions of Sweden and Kuwait and to my colleagues — the Permanent Representatives of those two delegations — personally for their truly outstanding work.

Allow me to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock for his briefing, which was, as always, meticulous and most enlightening. We reiterate our admiration for his work and the work of his teams in responding to the humanitarian emergency in Syria. I also welcome the presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mr. Stephanus Blok, among us today.

As Mr. Lowcock has already recalled to us, the situation in Syria continues to be a source of extreme concern. In the Idlib region in particular, ceasefire violations are on the rise and the risk of a humanitarian disaster still cannot be ruled out. We must therefore remain fully mobilized around three key priorities: the need to protect civilians, the need to guarantee humanitarian access and the need for a lasting political solution in Syria.

First, on the need to protect civilians, as highlighted by Mr. Lowcock, the situation in Idlib remains exceedingly fragile. The cessation of hostilities should not be a temporary solution, but should provide for the lasting stabilization of the situation in Idlib in line with the commitments made at the quadripartite summit held in Istanbul for a sustainable ceasefire in north-west Syria. That is the only way to protect civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel. It must be a top priority for all stakeholders. All parties must respect their obligations as stipulated by international humanitarian law. That imperative is non-negotiable.

The second priority is to ensure humanitarian access. It is imperative that the 13 million people in need receive humanitarian assistance. It is unacceptable for the regime to continue to block convoys to hard-to-reach areas. We reiterate our call to the actors with

influence over the regime to ensure safe, full and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Syrian territory, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law. In Rukban camp in particular, it is essential that the United Nations be able to quickly dispatch a new convoy to deliver aid to the tens of thousands of people trapped in the camp and living in dire conditions.

While the Council has just adopted resolution 2449 (2018), which renews the mechanism established by resolution 2165 (2014), I would like to recall that there is no alternative to cross-border aid for the effective and impartial delivery of assistance to millions of people in need, including in Idlib, while the regime continues to use humanitarian aid for political purposes. That mechanism provides several hundred thousand people with crucial assistance every day.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate that there will be no lasting humanitarian solution without a credible political process. It is essential for everyone to assume their responsibilities and allow the United Nations to convene the first meeting of the constitutional committee before the end of the year, in accordance with the commitments made in Istanbul on 27 October. Provided that its composition is credible and balanced, the committee would be a positive first step in a political process to be conducted under the supervision of the United Nations, within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). Such political progress should, in turn, facilitate the improvement of the humanitarian situation, with the goal of kick-starting a virtuous circle.

It is all the more urgent to recall this in a humanitarian briefing: humanitarian aid is an immediate need, subject to the conditions of strict neutrality, impartiality and independence. It is to be differentiated from reconstruction, which will be possible only once a credible, inclusive and irreversible political transition has begun.

Let us not be fooled by the regime's fable. The reality of the statistics clearly shows that it is not the absence of reconstruction that prevents the voluntary and safe return of refugees; it is the absence of guarantees against arbitrary arrests, forced expropriations, dispossession of identity documents, forced conscription and, more broadly, the lack of credible progress in the political process. The conditions for the return of refugees are freedom and security. We are committed to enabling such a safe and dignified return of refugees to their homes and properties. But that collectively implies creating the conditions for that return to be possible, within the framework guaranteed by international law.

France will continue to spare no effort to respond to the humanitarian situation in Syria and promote a credible political solution.

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. Once again, we commend the very important work the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its humanitarian partners do on a daily basis to help the Syrian people. Mr. Lowcock's briefings shed light on the facts regarding Syrians in need of help and the humanitarian system's ability to reach them, and that helps us make decisions in the Security Council based on the realities on the ground and not on political spin.

The United States is proud to have voted in favour of resolution 2449 (2018), which renews resolution 2165 (2014) for another 12 months. I would like to commend Sweden and Kuwait for their stewardship over the negotiations to ensure that the Council's deliberations on the continuation of the United Nation's vital cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism remained focused on the needs of the Syrian people, millions of whom have received life-sustaining aid from the humanitarian aid mechanism established under resolution 2165 (2014) since the mandate was first adopted by the Council, four years ago.

Today's vote to continue the cross-border humanitarian deliveries will ensure that food, clothing, shelter and medical supplies reach, on average, 1 million people in Syria each month. The United Nations cross-border mechanism is transparent, effective and essential for improving humanitarian conditions inside Syria.

In the face of that astounding humanitarian need, the United States remains the single-largest humanitarian donor to the Syria crisis, having provided over $9 billion in humanitarian aid to those most in need since the start of the conflict. We are proud of our unwavering commitment to support the Syrian people, and we will continue it. But we need to be clear that conditions in Syria are not changing for the better, even though some would like us to think that they are.

In 2018 the Al-Assad regime attacked civilian populations using chemical weapons, air strikes and barrel bombs to reassert control over half the territory. Even as the regime has seized more territory, the truth

is that humanitarian needs are getting worse. In Syria today, there are 13 million people, over 70 per cent of the country's population, in need of humanitarian assistance. And, by far, most of the people who need assistance are in areas controlled by the regime. That is because, as always, the Al-Assad regime seeks to punish the Syrian people, not to help them.

When we look at the significant gaps in humanitarian access in eastern Ghouta, Idlib and Rukban, and we look at the ongoing instability of the security situation and the hundreds of thousands who remain arbitrarily detained in regime prisons, it is clear that the conditions in Syria are still very dire, and for many Syrians they remain very dangerous. Those conditions are not conducive to the facilitation of large-scale returns of refugees, and now is not the time to be pushing Syrians to return home.

Until the Al-Assad regime lives up to its commitments to provide regular, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and fully engage in a political transition, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), the United States and our partners will not consider providing reconstruction funds for Syria, absent an irreversible political process.

It is a sad reality of the Syrian conflict that the Al-Assad regime remains committed to using humanitarian access and aid as a political tool. To this day Damascus has not approved United Nations aid convoys to access Idlib, where 3 million people can be reached only through the cross-border mechanism. The people of Rukban are once again waiting on the regime to facilitate a second aid convoy. The uncertainty around humanitarian access and the regime's unwillingness to uphold humanitarian principles are why a 12-month renewal of resolution 2165 (2014) was so critical.

Make no mistake that the United States looks forward to the day when this mandate is no longer needed — first, because there will be no risk of further military escalation by the regime or its allies, and, secondly, because we will see tangible improvements in unhindered and sustained access throughout Syria. However, it is clear from Under-Secretary-General Lowcock's briefing today that the humanitarian conditions in Syria remain dire. Security conditions are fragile, and in some areas they remain very dangerous. Cross-line and cross-border access remains vital for millions of Syrian civilians who rely on the continuation of this resolution's mechanism for life-sustaining aid.

Unfortunately, the risks of even greater humanitarian suffering in Syria remain high, absent tangible progress towards a political solution through the formation of a constitutional committee and due to troubling reports and indications of a potential military escalation in Idlib, despite the fragile ceasefire, held together by the Turkey-Russia brokered demilitarized zone.

Let me repeat that any military escalation in Idlib would be catastrophic for the millions of non-combatants there and for the stability of Syria's neighbours. Last week, my Government made public our analysis that pro-regime forces likely used tear gas against civilians in Aleppo on 24 November, and then the Al-Assad regime and Russia falsely accused the opposition and extremist groups of conducting a chlorine attack. We believe that the intention behind Damascus and Moscow's disinformation campaign was to use the alleged attack to undermine confidence in the ceasefire in Idlib.

Given the grave humanitarian consequences of a break in the Idlib ceasefire, it is important that Council members do all they can to ensure that the ceasefire holds. Efforts must move forward to form the constitutional committee as quickly as possible. Russia's promises to actively support the United Nations efforts to convene the committee have yet to be fulfilled, and the 30 December deadline, laid out in the Istanbul summit statement, is rapidly approaching.

Few places exemplify humanitarian need as much as Rukban, where once again a United Nations shipment of assistance is delayed. The United States is gravely concerned by the humanitarian conditions in Rukban and calls on the Al-Assad regime and the Russian Federation to take all the necessary steps to urgently facilitate the next aid convoy. The United Nations has underscored the need to move with a sense of urgency. Winterization supplies are urgently needed in the camp and UNICEF stands ready to conduct another round of critical children's immunizations. It should be noted that those vaccinations are time-sensitive.

This should not be a complicated or contentious process. The United States and Russia have worked successfully together to make a humanitarian delivery possible in November. It is important that we — the United States and Russia — work together with the United Nations again now to secure a second delivery to Rukban this month, as agreed.

Progress is possible. Let us spare no effort to facilitate an immediate delivery. There is no time for further delays. The United States is ready to move forward with the second delivery to Rukban immediately, and with the convening of the constitutional committee immediately. The Syrian people are still counting on the Council. We call on our fellow Council members and the Syrian regime and its allies to join in our sense of urgency and resolve these issues without further delay.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for being at this meeting, for his briefing and for all the work that his team is doing on the ground to help the people of Syria.

The United Kingdom joins other colleagues in welcoming the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018). This ensures that aid can continue to move across borders to reach those people who depend on its arrival. We thank the co-penholders, Sweden and Kuwait, for their sustained efforts to make agreement today possible.

As others have noted, this resolution keeps open routes for humanitarian aid that offer a lifeline to millions of Syrians, including those in hard-to-reach areas and those who could not otherwise receive the support they need. The United Nations has stated that 2.6 million people are accessible only through these cross-border routes.

The decision to renew resolution 2165 (2014) by way of today's adoption is therefore positive, but it is no cause for celebration, as the need for its renewal is the result solely of the dire situation on the ground. Approximately 13 million people in Syria need humanitarian assistance, and 5.2 million of them are considered to be in acute need.

As the Dutch Minister reminded us, every month we come to the Council, we hear a briefing from the Under-Secretary-General and we say the same things. Every month there is a list from Under-Secretary-General of requests that the United Nations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) have made for access for humanitarian assistance, and every month, very sadly and almost criminally negligently, the Syrian Government does not grant the request of the United Nations humanitarian wing. I think we all need to demand a really comprehensive answer as to why the requests from OCHA are not being met when so many people depend on humanitarian assistance for their survival. I really would appeal through you, Mr. President, to both the Russian and Syrian representatives in the Chamber today to let us have a proper explanation or, better, to grant the requests of OCHA so that those people can get the help they need.

We want to look forward to a time when humanitarian aid is no longer necessary, when we can offer help in rebuilding and reconstruction and when conditions allow the Syrians who have had to flee to return to their homes voluntarily, in safety and dignity and in line with international humanitarian law. But we need to be crystal clear that we are not there yet; Syria is not there yet. This resolution, as both my French and American colleagues noted, is emphatically not a call for refugee return. It is for the Syrian parties to create conditions that are conducive to their safe and voluntary return. That is a critical distinction. The Al-Assad regime, supported by its backers, has not only created an environment that makes humanitarian aid essential for millions of Syrians, but it continues to use aid as a weapon of war. We therefore call on the Syrian authorities to cease doing that respond to the requests of the United Nations and engage with the political process to pursue a credible, balanced political settlement, which provides the only foreseeable way out of the conflict. We look to Russia to use its influence with the Syrian authorities to press them to do that, maintain the ceasefire in Idlib, in accordance with the Sochi agreement, and ensure that humanitarian access continues for as long as it is necessary.

I also want to echo that reconstruction money will not be available from my Government or from our partners until there is a viable and lasting political process.

Adopting today's resolution sends a clear message from the international community that we remain committed to supporting the people of Syria. At the same time, it also sends a very clear message that aid should never be use as a weapon and must reach those who need it without impediment. It is also an important reminder that, notwithstanding our differences, as the Dutch Minister further reminded us, the Council can — and should — act on Syria.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his comprehensive briefing. Allow me to also praise our colleagues from Kuwait and Sweden for their efforts and their leadership in leading the process of very difficult negotiations. I am very pleased to see the result, and I congratulate them again on their work.

We welcome the outcome of today's vote on resolution 2449 (2018), which renews the cross-border deliveries mechanism. We have underlined our strong support for that renewal many times. It enables humanitarian supplies to cross into Syria, provides aid to those in urgent need and supports the delivery of basic services.

The conflict in Syria has caused violence and violations of the international law, including human rights law, and has brought suffering to the civilian population of Syria. The continuing impunity for serious violations of international humanitarian law remains for us a grave concern.

After a period of relative calm over the past two months, we are alarmed by the recent negative impact of armed conflict on civilians in many parts of Syria: the north-west and north-east of the country in particular. Any military operations should take all feasible precautions to avoid harm to the thousands of civilians who are trapped in the middle of the fighting on the ground.

We again see a risk of humanitarian catastrophe in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas. Civilians across Idlib and the surrounding areas have continued to face a range of security threats, while massive humanitarian needs have persisted. We consider the agreement between Russia and Turkey on the Idlib de-escalation zone a right move towards avoiding a humanitarian catastrophe. But, at the same time, we again stress that all parties to the conflict should ensure the full implementation of the agreement.

While underlining the obligation of all the parties to the conflict to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, we insist on practical measures to alleviate civilian suffering. That is why we strongly believe that cross-border assistance remains a vital component of this major humanitarian response, which reaches millions of Syrians each month. It has to be noted that, according to humanitarian workers, one third of the people in need of humanitarian assistance are in areas that cannot be accessed from inside Syria, including nearly to 2 million internally displaced people in the Idlib de-escalation zone. Aid delivered from Turkey and Iraq continues to save lives.

Let me conclude by underlining that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. A political agreement remains the only way towards peace. That requires a genuine political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). In that context, I want to express our regret that no tangible progress was made during the last meeting in Astana in overcoming the stalemate on the composition of the constitutional committee. The efforts of the Special Envoy to establish a legitimate, credible and balanced constitutional committee in his remaining time in office have our full support.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

We would first like to comment on the Council's adoption just now of resolution 2449 (2018), extending the mandate for the cross-border delivery of humanitarian assistance into Syria. Our position on that non-transparent — to put it mildly — mechanism is well known. The new realities in the Syrian Arab Republic demand that it be rejigged with the ultimate goal of being gradually but inevitably removed. That fact that that view was not reflected in the resolution determined our position on the vote. We were not about to block it altogether, owing to humanitarian considerations and appeals from our partners in the region. However, we want to point out that its text is divorced from reality and is based on four-year-old formulas. For example, why keep the Dar'a-Ramtha cross-border checkpoint on the list when the Syrian authorities have been controlling it from the Syrian side for a long time now? In the next few months we intend to monitor the supply of humanitarian assistance under the cross-border mechanism carefully and demand proper transparency and accountability.

The Secretariat's methods for preparing its reports on the humanitarian situation in Syria should also be carefully reviewed. The current report (S/2018/1104) does not cover such important points as assistance in rebuilding infrastructure, the trends in the return of refugees, the impact of unilateral sanctions on people's lives and mine-clearance issues. We urge our colleagues to reconsider the inflexibility of their approaches, which have little to do with the current situation in Syria, and to join in the collective efforts to improve the country's difficult socioeconomic situation, restore what the terrorists have destroyed and assure the inalienable right of refugees and internally displaced persons to return. In that context, we would like to point to the announcement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that more than 250,000 Syrians are ready to return home next year.

In our view, a selective approach to the provision of assistance to the Syrian people is unseemly. Politicizing issues related to humanitarian assistance is unacceptable. People cannot openly defame the Syrian Government while ignoring the unilateral steps taken by other actors in the Syrian conflict. At the very least, it is unethical to pretend that Raqqa does not exist. And yet 80 per cent of the city's civilian infrastructure lies in ruins. They are still pulling bodies out from under the rubble of people who died in the campaign to liberate the city from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), who according to some estimates number more than 8,000. Incidentally, at the time no one supported the proposal to introduce humanitarian pauses in order to get civilians away from the bombardments.

We need to urgently resolve two issues that are critical to improving the situation in Syria. The first is lifting the unilateral sanctions introduced by a number of States without delay. Those restrictions harm ordinary Syrians most of all, as independent experts, including some in the United Nations system, have acknowledged, by the way. Secondly, we have to end the illegal occupation of Syrian territory, which is not only undermining its territorial integrity and sovereignty but also strengthening separatist trends there, and that represents a threat to the national security of neighbouring countries.

Withdrawal from the 55-kilometre so-called security zone established by the United States around the Syrian town of Al-Tanf is the main precondition for a lasting solution to the Rukban problem. As we know, the conditions in the camp there, which according to various estimates is housing as many as 50,000 people, are very difficult, in fact bordering on a humanitarian disaster, with the residents basically being held hostage by the illegal armed groups active in the area that are linked to ISIL. Considering the deteriorating situation in the camp, at the beginning of November Russia supported sending a United Nations humanitarian convoy and made significant efforts to help organize it, including through its contacts with the Government of Syria. Unfortunately, the humanitarian operation within the 55-kilometre zone was not well organized. The distribution of the humanitarian aid was farmed out to militants from the Maghawir Al-Thawra group. The staff of the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent had very limited access to the distribution process, which resulted in part of it falling into the militants' hands. That means that the next delivery of humanitarian aid to Rukban must be carefully thought through and the shortcomings of the first convoy eliminated. We have to agree on parameters that will ensure maximum transparency and the targeted distribution of assistance without the participation of illegal armed groups, and the Americans occupying the area have the responsibility for that.

The fact that the trend towards stabilization is strengthening in Syria is undeniable. Despite the continuing problems, there has been genuinely positive progress on the humanitarian front that is particularly noticeable in the territories controlled by Damascus. As we have repeatedly stressed, at this critical time the international community must now extend a helping hand to the Syrians in order to help them overcome the devastation and restore normal life for those who have made the decision to return voluntarily to their homeland. Incidentally, since the Russian initiative on this was launched in July the total number of returnees is now in the tens of thousands.

Today our American colleagues gave us disinformation squared. In April the Syrian Government was blamed for a staged chemical attack in Douma in eastern Ghouta. The outcome of the investigation is still unknown. The experts are apparently still collecting something or other. Might that be because admitting the provocation would mean acknowledging full-on involvement in the illegal act of aggression in April for which the provocation served as an excuse? And now, when we have reliable information that shells containing chlorine were used by the same militants who had used them before — which our Western partners had admitted — they have come up with a new tactic, accusing Syria and Russia of disinformation and forgery. The Syrian Government has invited specialists from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to Syria, but for some reason they are in no hurry to arrive. Apparently they are studying something remotely. Where other areas were concerned, they were in a rush to get there, although it is true that they did their evidence-collecting in spots far from where the incidents had actually taken place. And yet now Washington has borrowed a brilliant formula originally dreamed up by London whereby the Syrian Government poisoned its own citizens with tear gas and then blamed the militants. Gentlemen, this is all dreadfully clumsy and we can see right through the propaganda.

The Astana guarantors are now focusing on the situation in Idlib within the framework of the

implementation of the 17 September stabilization memorandum. However, it must be understood that the importance of a sustainable ceasefire does not negate the need to continue working to effectively combat terrorism. We note Turkey's serious efforts within its existing commitments to separate the terrorists from moderate groups. It would be helpful if those who originally supported those groups with the aim of replacing the legitimate Government made efforts to educate them. That would be a more fundamental contribution to the efforts to reach a settlement than the constant barrage of groundless questions and demands directed at Russia and other States about what to do and how to do it.

Russia and the other guarantor countries will continue their intensive efforts on the political front with regard to implementing the decision taken by the Syrians in Sochi to form a constitutional committee. Right now, the negotiations are at a particularly intensive stage. We continue to believe that all the parameters for the activity of a constitutional committee should be approved by the Syrians themselves. That is the only way that it can be effective and functional. We want to emphasize that there is no viable alternative to a constitutional committee. We urge everyone to join in the collective work of establishing a comprehensive political process, which is crucial to Syria, the Middle East and the entire international community, under the auspices of the United Nations and in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia): Let me start by welcoming the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018), which we believe will enable the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to deliver essential life-saving assistance to all Syrians, based on their needs. We have always believed that the Council should be united in supporting the United Nations and its humanitarian partners, which have been working under difficult circumstances to deliver aid to millions of Syrians. Syrians' humanitarian needs should be our priority, and addressing them should be central to the Council's deliberations and decisions. We hope that the resolution we adopted today will contribute to ending the suffering of all Syrians. We would like to express our appreciation to the penholders, Kuwait and Sweden, for effectively leading the negotiation process, and we thank all delegations for their constructive engagement.

We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing. Since this is our last statement on the Syrian humanitarian issue as a member of the Security Council, I want to take this opportunity to reiterate our profound appreciation for his effective leadership. His briefings have always been very useful in bringing the humanitarian tragedy in Syria to the attention of the Council and the entire world. I thank him for his outstanding and impeccable service. We also thank all humanitarian workers for their selfless service in delivering aid to all in need.

Despite a relative drop in the overall intensity of violence, civilians in some parts of Syria are still affected by the direct and indirect consequences of hostilities, including deaths, injuries and the destruction of civilian facilities. In that regard, we concur with the Secretary-General, whose most recent report (S/2018/1104) appealed for enhancing the efforts to maintain the de-escalation and the agreed demilitarization zone in Idlib and to protect civilians. We reiterate our appreciation to Turkey and Russia for their continued efforts to implement the Idlib agreement. Avoiding a military escalation there remains critical to averting any possible humanitarian catastrophe. In that connection, we encourage all States with influence on the parties to work together and strengthen global coordination in combating terrorist groups on the United Nations list.

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners have continued to reach millions of people through all the available access routes, including through cross-border assistance, which the report of the Secretary-General cites as a vital part of the humanitarian response. We welcome the continued endeavours to scale up humanitarian aid delivered from inside Syria. In that regard, we strongly encourage the United Nations and the Syrian Government to continue their consultations on improving humanitarian access to all areas, including those that are hard to reach. The safe, sustained and unhindered delivery of humanitarian access remains critical for all Syrians. In that regard, the implementation of the resolution we adopted today is crucial to improving humanitarian access.

In conclusion, as we have repeatedly stated, only a comprehensive political solution can address the humanitarian tragedy in Syria. There is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. It will be resolved only with a political solution, facilitated by the United Nations, based on resolution 2254 (2015), which commits to meeting the legitimate aspirations of the people of Syria. As the Secretary-General reminded us in his report, the sole goal of United Nations efforts — ending

the suffering of Syrians — should be supported by us all. In that regard, we look forward to Special Envoy de Mistura's briefing next week.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his briefing.

As some of our colleagues have already said, the conflict in Syria has lasted for more than seven years, and according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 500,000 people have lost their lives and approximately 13 million people are in need, of whom 5.3 million are children. Nonetheless, the Syrian people continue to hope for peace in their country and for a return to normal everyday life, which at the moment seems a long way off. We deplore the fact that non-State armed opposition groups and Security Council-designated terrorist groups are still perpetrating attacks that result in the death or displacement of innocent civilians. In spite of that, however, we want to remind the Council that all counter-terrorism-related initiatives should take international law into consideration.

Bolivia voted in favour of today's resolution because we believe that humanitarian assistance for the Syrian people is urgent, particularly those in hard-to-reach areas, as well as the most vulnerable who are in need of protection and psychosocial support. We thank the delegations of Kuwait and Sweden for their commitment during the negotiations on the text for today's adoption of resolution 2449 (2018).

There have been numerous meetings on this issue since Bolivia's election as a member of the Council. We have witnessed the pressing need of the Syrian people for humanitarian assistance, but we have also seen major progress made in stabilizing and in de-escalating the violence of previous years, which in the past few months has brought about a palpable change in the conflict on the ground, owing primarily to the opening up of dialogue between the parties involved. We highlight the Astana agreements, which have enabled the establishment of important de-escalation zones, and which we see as one of the initiatives that will help to reduce the level of violence in order to facilitate peace and stability in Syria. We also want to highlight the agreement brokered by Russia and Turkey establishing a demilitarized zone to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and emergency medical evacuation, as well as the surrender of heavy weaponry by some members of terrorist groups. We encourage the parties to replicate those agreements, as well as that made in Istanbul on 27 October between Turkey, Russia, Germany and France. Such commitments have a major impact on people when they enable humanitarian assistance and medical attention to reach them quickly.

We also commend the most recent compromise between the United Nations and the Governments of Syria, Jordan, Russia and the United States enabling a convoy with humanitarian aid for 50,000 people to enter Rukban camp, and we call for the continuation of efforts to bring in humanitarian aid and cross-border convoys within a framework of respect for the sovereignty of Syria, which has reclaimed much of its territory.

I would once again like to pay special tribute to the personnel of the various humanitarian agencies and organizations who risk their own safety and lives to do their work. Within the framework of international humanitarian law, we call on the parties to guarantee unconditional and unhindered access to aid personnel, keeping them safe and secure and ensuring that humanitarian convoys and personnel, medical centres and schools do not become military targets, regardless of the circumstances. We encourage the parties involved to continue their efforts to enable emergency medical evacuations and the establishment of humanitarian corridors that allow civilians to move around voluntarily, as well as ensuring the dignified and safe return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their places of origin. Clearing those areas of unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and landmines is an essential task, as is re-establishing water and sanitation services, schools and hospitals.

Bolivia rejects any attempts to fragment Syria or sow sectarianism in that country. We also reject the presence in Syria of foreign military forces without the authorization of the Syrian Government. Those forces must be withdrawn within the framework of international law and the principles of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. We also ask Mr. Lowcock to include in his next briefing the impact of the unilateral sanctions on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Those sanctions are illegal under international law and there is no doubt that they have an impact on the delivery of humanitarian aid. In addition, we reiterate our call for humanitarian aid to not be selective; furthermore, we call for the depoliticization of humanitarian aid. Finally, we

reiterate, as the representative of Ethiopia pointed out, there is no military solution to the situation in Syria. The only solution is to be found in an inclusive, Syrian-led process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and as part of the Geneva process under the auspices of the United Nations.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the convening of this meeting and reiterates our gratitude to Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and his entire team for their work and for keeping us informed on a monthly basis about the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The shifting of the subject of this meeting from the political to the humanitarian briefing — the former originally slated for next week — led my delegation think that some development must have occurred that would make it possible to address the humanitarian issue in Syria with optimism and hope. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Despite the enormous human and financial resources mobilized and deployed by the United Nations and its humanitarian partners, the situation on the ground remains alarming. Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, enough has been said about the humanitarian situation and a number of reports have been produced that have led to the same conclusion, which is that the humanitarian situation remains extremely precarious, mainly due to increased hostilities in various parts of the country.

The Government of Equatorial Guinea remains concerned about the recent escalation of violence in various parts of the country, such as Idlib, where efforts must be redoubled to maintain the détente and ensure the demilitarization of the area, as agreed last September, and protect the civilian population. Furthermore, the reports of an alleged chemical attack at the end of November in Aleppo and the routine targeting of Deir ez-Zor by counter-terrorism operations require swift and decisive responses from the Council in order to protect thousands of families who, as the conflict continues, are losing their loved ones. Once again, we emphasize the need for the warring parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. Nothing justifies the deliberate use of explosive weapons in populated areas or the use of chemical substances as a weapon of war. As such, we voted in favour of resolution 2449 (2018), on United Nations assistance in Syria, because we believe that the resolution is essential for cross-border operations. We hope that its adoption will, in turn, alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. We thank Ambassador Mansour and Ambassador Skoog for facilitating the drafting, negotiation and adoption of the resolution.

As the Secretary-General clearly describes in his report (S/2018/1104) and according to data from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, cross-border deliveries of humanitarian aid remain an indispensable lifeline for hundreds of thousands of people throughout Syria. Food aid reached an average of more than 750,000 people each month in the first nine months of 2018 as a result of the cross-border activities of the United Nations. There is no doubt that after many years of ongoing conflict, the Security Council, whose decisions are binding, should continue to play a key role in shaping Syria's future. It should do so by bringing forward any initiatives that may one day, as someone once said, heal the wounds of the suffering body of Syria. And that should always be done with full respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the country. The Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea will continue to prioritize a political solution to the conflict and calls once again for members of the Council to pay more attention to swiftly establishing and operationalizing the constitutional committee, in accordance with the outcomes of Syria's National Dialogue Conference and resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China abstained in the voting on resolution 2449 (2018), on renewing the measures for cross-border humanitarian assistance to Syria. China is of the view that the international community's humanitarian operations in Syria should abide by the principles that guide United Nations humanitarian work, as well as the relevant provisions of international law, and scrupulously observe the principles of neutrality, impartiality and non-politicization, while ensuring that all areas in Syria and all the populations in need receive timely assistance.

Cross-border humanitarian assistance is a special modality in response to a set of specific circumstances. It must fully respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and proceed in strict compliance with Council resolutions. Actions in that regard should be place under the oversight of the United Nations, throughout the process, with greater

transparency. Due attention should be accorded to better coordination with the Syrian Government and practical measures should be put in place to prevent aid supplies from falling into the hands of terrorist groups.

China commends Kuwait and Sweden in their roles as co-penholders for taking on board proposals from Member States regarding, inter alia, facilitating the return of Syrian refugees, improving humanitarian operations and adjusting the frequency of the reports of the Secretary-General over the course of the consultations on the resolution. Nevertheless, some legitimate concerns raised by members of the Council, including China, were not fully taken on board. There was still room for improvement. We are of the view that members of the Council should continue to engage on that in order to maximize consensus. I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing. I also commend the efforts of the United Nations and other actors concerned to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. China would like to share its perspective on the current humanitarian situation in Syria.

First, the humanitarian situation in Syria on the whole remains grim. Many years of conflict have left Syria with a large number of people in need of assistance, crumbling infrastructure, food insecurity and a lack of medical care and medicines. The situation in northern and eastern Syria remains fragile. Civilian casualties persist, as does the risk of a deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

Secondly, the security situation in Syria is stable on the whole. Conflict has eased throughout the country, which provides a more favourable environment for improving the humanitarian situation. Although the implementation of the memorandum on the stabilization of the situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone has encountered some obstacles, the implementation process is by and large under way. The Astana dialogue at the end of November continues to play an important role in the continued improvement of the Syrian situation and in consolidating the cessation of hostilities and violence.

Thirdly, Syria's humanitarian assistance needs have recently changed. As the situation in some parts of Syria improves, the number of Syrian refugees returning from neighbouring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon is on the rise. The projections of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees put this number at a quarter of a million in 2019. The number of internally displaced persons returning to their homes has also steadily increased. The restoration or reconstruction of housing and of water, electricity, medical and educational facilities is a basic requirement, and the removal of mines and other explosive remnants of war is now a top priority.

In view of the current situation, the Syrian parties should put the greater good of national destiny and people's well-being first, respect the relevant Council resolutions, resolve differences through dialogue and consultation, work together to keep Syria stable, prevent an escalation of conflict, and continue to create enabling conditions to ease the country's humanitarian situation. It is incumbent upon the international community to further increase its assistance — financial and in kind — to the Syrian people and intensify support for the host countries of Syrian refugees, including Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. At the same time, the international community should step up its efforts to improve the humanitarian condition of returning Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons and create supportive conditions, whereby they can live and work happily in peace. Part of this process is the reconstruction of infrastructure.

The current situation in Syria is offering a window of opportunity for the political settlement process. The international community should firmly support the role of the United Nations as the main channel of mediation and push the Syrian parties to come to a solution that addresses the concerns of all parties through negotiations, based on the principle that the process should be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned and in accordance with Council resolution 2254 (2015). Only by so doing can we truly ease the humanitarian woes facing Syria once and for all, leading to a comprehensive, just and proper settlement of the Syrian issue.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his comprehensive and very informative briefing.

As we know that the ongoing conflict continues to have an impact on the lives of civilians in Syria, we strongly support humanitarian actors, including United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, operating across the country in saving lives. We voted for resolution 2449 (2018) today, as we did for every resolution during our two-year term in the Security Council in which the issue of humanitarian aid

and access was discussed. In so doing, Kazakhstan stresses the importance of abiding by the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality, with assistance provided to all, whether in Government-controlled or non-Government-controlled areas, thus leading to an even distribution of humanitarian aid.

We commend UNICEF and the World Health Organization for their work in Syria, especially the 18-month-long intensive vaccination campaign, which has been impressive and ended polio and virus outbreaks in and around Deir ez-Zor. Global experts in public health, urology and epidemiology confirm this conclusion.

With respect to the talks in Astana, we welcome the participation of the representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the recent round of the Astana process on 28 and 29 November, for that led to ways of mitigating the humanitarian situation during discussions with the delegations of Iran, Russia and Turkey. At the same time, in the disaster zones, we see the lack of control over the fair and efficient distribution of food, fuel, drinking water and medicines, especially when the resources flow into the hands of the armed groups and not the civilian population.

Humanitarian aid must not be politicized. It is therefore necessary to implement a mechanism for coordinating the activities of the ICRC, the Syrian Red Crescent Society, United Nations agencies, the Government of Syria and the guarantor countries. We see the great value of the United Nations initiative on demining and restoring the infrastructure of territories liberated from terrorists so as to enable humanitarian operations to begin. This will also assist refugees, including those in the Rukban refugee camp, in returning home.

Kazakhstan considers the initiatives and programmes of the Food and Agriculture Organization most relevant, and appeals to other countries to support and promote the organization's programmes, including providing Syrian farmers with free or subsidized seeds and fertilizers, in order to improve the food situation in the country.

Finally, we acknowledge with deep appreciation the contribution of all participants in the Astana process and in particular the guarantor States. The Astana negotiations on Syria will focus on consolidating peaceful efforts in Syria and ending the human suffering. This is possible, it is evident, through an inclusive Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. It is only when the political tensions ease that the humanitarian crisis will be relieved over time.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting and for Mr. Mark Lowcock's important briefing.

Peru follows with deep concern the continuing conflict and the serious humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. It is clear that in recent months there have been developments on the ground and that levels of violence have been reduced. It is also true that millions of people are living in conditions of extreme vulnerability.

We must deplore the persistence of violence in the north-west of the country and its impact on the civilian population, with new fatalities and injuries. We consider it essential to avoid another humanitarian tragedy by preserving the demilitarized zone established in Idlib, thanks to the agreement reached by Turkey and the Russian Federation last September. We also consider it necessary to address the precarious conditions in which the civilian population trapped in Deir ez-Zor is living, and to protect them from attacks directed against Da'esh militants.

In reiterating our strong condemnation of all terrorist activity, we emphasize the need to observe the humanitarian principles of proportionality, legality and precaution. In welcoming the recent United Nations humanitarian deployment in Rukban, we underscore the obligation to allow sustained access to assistance for as long as necessary.

On the other hand, we would like to welcome the first advances made by the Astana group in the identification of missing persons, the return of mortal remains, and the release of detainees and missing persons. We hope that new and further developments in these important humanitarian issues will contribute in the coming weeks and months to promoting the relief from tensions required to end the conflict and achieve Syrian reconciliation.

I conclude by stressing the need for the Security Council to remain united in the exercise of its responsibilities under international humanitarian law,

as reflected in the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018), which, inter alia, has extended access to cross-border assistance. In this regard, we acknowledge the efforts of the delegations of Sweden and Kuwait to move the draft resolution forward with a view to alleviating the suffering of the Syrian population.

However, we must bear in mind that only the achievement of a political solution that lays the foundations for sustainable peace in Syria will make it possible to overcome the humanitarian disaster that continues to affect its population. In this vein, we wish, finally, to stress the importance of convening the constitutional committee before the end of this year, with a view to making progress in the construction of a political solution to the Syrian conflict, guided by resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

My delegation would like to congratulate Mr. Mark Lowcock on his excellent briefing on the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Côte d'Ivoire remains particularly concerned about the precarious humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, which has recently been aggravated by the military escalation in the north-west of the country, including in the demilitarized zone in the Idlib governorate, which was established in accordance with the agreement signed by the Russian Federation and Turkey on 17 September. This new military escalation, following allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Aleppo by armed groups, is an impediment to the ongoing peace process and threatens the lives and well-being of millions of civilians living in the region. My delegation would like to remind all stakeholders of their responsibilities to ensure safe, prompt, unimpeded and sustainable access for humanitarian assistance to persons in distress throughout the Syrian territory. In that regard, we welcome the arrival of a United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent humanitarian convoy at the Rukban displaced persons camp on 3 November after a 10-month interruption. That delivery provided relief for the people seriously affected by weather, the sanitary conditions and the lack of basic goods.

My delegation voted in favour of renewing for one year the mechanism for the delivery of cross-border humanitarian aid, which expires on 10 January 2019. For the fourth consecutive year, that allows the United Nations and its partners to continue their humanitarian assistance work despite the many challenges. We thank Kuwait and Sweden for their work in that regard. Côte d'Ivoire emphasizes the fact that all parties to the conflict have the obligation to respect international humanitarian law and human rights, including the responsibility to protect civilians.

In conclusion, my country remains convinced that only a lasting political solution will put an end to the Syrian crisis. The intra-Syrian negotiations conducted under the auspices of the United Nations and the Astana and Sochi processes constitute the legitimate frameworks to achieve that. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire urges the warring parties to agree on the formation of the constitutional committee, which is meant to draft a new constitution. That will be a decisive step towards organizing transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections with a view to restoring lasting peace and stability in Syria.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The paradox that attracted my attention during this meeting on the humanitarian situation in my country, Syria — throughout Syria, not only in part of it — is that some colleagues who spoke, in particular the Permanent Representatives of Sweden, Kuwait, the United States of America, Britain and France, had an extraordinarily narrow-minded view of resolution 2449 (2018) on renewing the so-called mechanism for the delivery of cross-border aid. It was repeated at the beginning of all their statements. They wanted the extension of the mechanism only to transcend Syrian sovereignty by continuing the cross-border aid. That is the crux of the issue. They disregarded the fact that such operations — the so-called cross-border humanitarian aid — covers only 5 per cent of the assistance delivered to Syrians. Ninety-five per cent of humanitarian assistance is therefore delivered within the Syrian territory, not across the borders.

That is of course apart from the fact that the border crossings with Turkey are used to smuggle weapons and terrorists, not to provide humanitarian aid. It is a long story that we have repeatedly mentioned. There are dozens of Turkish officers and judges in Turkish prisons because they revealed that the cross-border convoys

were delivering weapons, not humanitarian assistance. Despite that fact, some are still doubtful after eight years of the terrorist war being waged against my country by a devilish global coalition, some members of which are present in the Council's Chamber.

Today, we are considering the fifty-eighth report of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian situation in my country, Syria (S/2018/1104). As representatives know, the Security Council has adopted many resolutions and held hundreds of formal and informal meetings in that regard. I believe that, after all those resolutions and meetings, it is high time for the Council to ask the following question: is the purpose of those reports, meetings and resolutions really to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria or for some to put political pressure on the Syrian Government and to use the suffering and pain of Syrians for cheap political purposes? I would say that if the objective, as some allege, is to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria, what we need today is not to adopt new resolutions or to hold spectacular meetings, but to do the following.

First, it is necessary to help the Syrian Government to combat the remnants of the armed terrorist groups, which were the main cause of the humanitarian crisis and its escalation, including the displaced persons and refugee crises. Anyone following the crisis and truly wanting the well-being of Syrians would see that the humanitarian crisis is only in areas infiltrated by those armed terrorist groups, which harbour illegal foreign troops.

Damascus has 8 million inhabitants. We do not face any humanitarian problems there. There is no humanitarian crisis in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs or Hamah. They are all under the control of the State. The humanitarian crisis is prevalent only in areas under the control of armed terrorist groups and foreign occupation. Members have talked about Al-Tanf and Rukban. Who protects the terrorists from Da'esh in those areas? Is it not the United States forces?

Secondly, the Security Council must shoulder its responsibility by taking serious and immediate steps to stop the aggression, massacres and systematic destruction of infrastructure in Syria carried out by the illegal coalition led by the United States of America. The Council must compel the countries of that illegal coalition to abide by the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the Council resolutions, which all underline the condemnation of such crimes of aggression and interference in the internal affairs of States, while undermining the territorial integrity of Member States. It is as if all that was not set out in the Council's resolutions but was written by Shakespeare 400 years ago.

Thirdly, there must be an immediate lifting of the unilateral coercive measures imposed against the Syrian people by certain States, some of which are members of the Council and present in the Chamber. Those measures have greatly harmed the livelihood of Syrians. My colleagues the Ambassador of the Russian Federation and the Ambassador of Bolivia have thankfully mentioned that. Those ongoing measures, which are described by some as sanctions, are not sanctions because they were not imposed by the Security Council. They are unilateral coercive measures that are condemned by the so-called international community. We have adopted many resolutions in the General Assembly in that regard. The continuation of those measures is the main obstacle to ensuring a response to the basic needs of Syrians, supporting their livelihood and providing the basic requirements for the return of displaced Syrians and refugees to their homes and normal lives.

Fourthly, international humanitarian assistance must be stepped up to respond to the needs of the Syrians, especially given the current status of financing humanitarian assistance, which has yet to meet expectations, as Mr. Lowcock stated earlier. Donors continue to hold their theatrical conferences and link their financing to political conditions that run counter to the principles of humanitarian work. They have refused to support the reconstruction of Syrian facilities that provide basic services in order to strengthen the steadfastness of the Syrians and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes in dignity and safety. We listened today to our colleagues' statements on behalf of the United States, Britain and France in which they clearly spoke about their political preconditions for reconstruction, the return of refugees and ending their support for terrorism.

Fifthly, the politicization of the humanitarian aspect in Syria must be brought to an end, including by stopping the spread of falsified information and statistics and ceasing to ignore facts, changes and developments on the ground. Of course, when we discuss that issue, we have facts, statistics and evidence at our disposal to substantiate what we say. Others make false statements by saying that only four or five humanitarian convoys

have reached their destination during a particular month. That is untrue. I was in Damascus a few days ago, and I visited the President of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. I asked him how many convoys had been sent since the beginning of this year to date. I point this out for Mr. Lowcock's benefit. He provided me with the table I have before me, showing a total of 182 convoys, all solely carried out exclusively by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. Some brief the Council with falsified information to say that only four or 12 convoys were sent. When they send a convoy to Rukban or Al-Tanf with our consent, they deliver it to the terrorists. It is not delivered to the 50,000 civilians who are in dire need of assistance. For Mr. Lowcock's information, the convoy that went to Al-Tanf ended up in the hands of the terrorists, as he is well aware.

Extending the provisions of resolution 2165 (2014) does not correspond to the recent developments on the ground since its adoption on 14 July 2014. There is no longer any need for cross-border humanitarian assistance as we have regained control of all areas that were categorized as besieged or hard-to-reach. In that regard, I would like to stress once again that the Government of Syria is the most eager of all to provide every form of humanitarian assistance to its people wherever they are throughout Syria. That is our duty and we are duly discharging it in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. The Government of Syria will remain committed to fulfilling that obligation. I also emphasize that my country stands ready to cooperate and coordinate with the United Nations and its humanitarian partners under the guidelines governing the coordination and enhancement of humanitarian work, which stress the need to respect the sovereignty and independence of host countries and the role of the countries concerned in overseeing the distribution of humanitarian assistance within their territories, as well as respect for the principles of impartiality, integrity and non-politicization.

There is a State in Syria. It is a State that deserves the respect of all and the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the provisions of the Charter and international law. That is the main issue. However, when certain representatives refer in their statements to a "regime" or use other, similar terms indiscriminately, such speech is not fitting of the Council or those addressing it.

Some Council members insist on extending the provisions of resolution 2165 (2014), while deliberately turning a blind eye to my country's objective criticism of the resolution and its extension. That in no way negates its defects or implementation since the very first day of its adoption. I would like to briefly cite those defects in the hope that they will not be committed later.

First, the hub for humanitarian assistance for the Syrian crisis is in Damascus — the capital of Syria — and not, as the resolution attempts to convey, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Gaziantep, Turkey, or any other place.

Secondly, receiving the consent of the Government of Syria before humanitarian assistance crosses its country's borders is a guiding principle in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/182. We should not simply be informed, as stated in the Security Council resolution, because such a move is similar to the consultation process conducted by the co-sponsors of resolution 2449 (2018), adopted today. They said that they had consulted us, which is correct. They did not, however, consider any of our observations. Is that what consultations mean?

Thirdly, the United Nations monitoring mechanism remains incapable to this very day of verifying the delivery of cross-border assistance and whether it reaches those for whom it is intended. The majority of those operations take place across the Turkish-Syrian border and are directed towards areas under the control of the armed terrorist groups that confiscate such aid and distribute it to their own members and families, as happened in Al-Tanf. The mechanism has stood idly by over the past four years rather than prevent the misuse of those borders by neighbouring countries that have taken advantage of the situation, provided support to armed terrorist groups and smuggled whatever those groups looted from factories, as well as antiquities and petroleum products, back into their own territories.

Fourthly, the effectiveness of cross-border assistance was and remains limited when compared to the assistance distributed from within the Syrian Arab Republic, as I previously mentioned.

Fifthly, senior OCHA staff members have not upheld the principles of transparency or provided the necessary guarantees to convince the international community that the cross-border assistance would reach those for whom it is intended and not the armed groups. To this very day, those senior OCHA staff members have not been able to provide an adequate explanation regarding the so-called partners or independent

companies — third parties — that were contracted to verify the delivery of assistance to warehouses and beneficiaries despite our repeated requests.

Sixthly, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which has been listed as a terrorist group by the Security Council, levies taxes on assistance delivered from across the borders, especially the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing between Turkey and Syria. That is considered to be direct financing of terrorism, in violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 2178 (2014), 2253 (2015) and 2396 (2017). That is exactly what Qatar did when it disbursed millions of dollars to Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front in the occupied Golan Heights under the pretext of paying ransom to free the hostages taken by those terrorist groups, which is once again a clear violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2368 (2017).

In conclusion, the Government, the people and the army of my country know very well who is our enemy and who is our friend. We know very well that our fight against terrorism is a war imposed on us by the sponsors of terrorism to drain our energies in order to advance their unjust plans in the region, foremost among which is eliminating the Palestinian question and drowning the people of the region in bloody obscurantism, fuelled by extremist Wahhabi ideology, ignorance and agendas of destruction.

My Government is more determined today than ever to fight the remaining armed terrorist groups in Idlib and elsewhere. We are firm in exercising our legal right for self-defence and expelling all foreign occupying forces that have entered our territories illegally. My colleague the representative of the United States of America brazenly stated today that his country has spent $8 billion towards financing terrorism in Syria, which he labelled as humanitarian assistance. Those $8 billion were in fact for financing terrorism.

We will continue to reconstruct the areas destroyed by terrorists in order to restore normality to everyday life and allow our people to enjoy the lives that they had built before the war was imposed on them by the terrorists. That will enable Syrian citizens to return to their homeland after they left it because of terrorism and the unilateral coercive economic measures that targeted their livelihoods.

The success of the sponsors of terrorism, destruction and the assassins of international law in certain places does not in any way mean that their plan will succeed in our country. We vow to foil their schemes and conspiracies.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.

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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8424th meeting
Friday, 14 December 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Adom	(Côte d'Ivoire)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Elé Ela
	Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Griffiths is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Amman.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: I come before the Security Council today with some good news and a message of hope. After two and half years of missed opportunities, I think it is fair to say that the political process to find a comprehensive solution to the conflict in Yemen has finally resumed. During our consultations in Sweden this week, parties to the conflict reached several agreements, included in the Stockholm declaration, which came into force on 13 December upon the publishing of the documents. That is no small achievement, which was made possible first and foremost by the commitment of the parties. The credit goes to them. I was extremely impressed by their dedication: all made concessions and all engaged, in-depth and at length, intensively and in good faith. Last week's consultations saw the "highest level of interaction between the parties ever seen in consultations on Yemen", as said by representatives of the different parties we heard during the week we were there.

I am sure that all members of the Council will share my sincere gratitude to the Government of Sweden for hosting us. Ambassador Olof Skoog and his colleagues understood better than any of us what was needed to make the consultations a success. I know that feeling was shared by all those present, including the leaders of both delegations, and we thank them.

For members of the Council and members of the international community, Sweden is also their success. The agreements reached would not have been possible without the extraordinary level of support from world leaders. I certainly feel very privileged to have been able to rely on them. I am thankful to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, who showed his personal support for the process at vital times and for the agreements we negotiated in Sweden.

I am grateful to President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, who followed our negotiations very closely, returned to Riyadh during the process and whose involvement was key on all files. It was President Hadi himself who personally confirmed to the Secretary-General, yesterday morning, his approval of the various proposals before us, on behalf of his delegation.

I am also grateful to the leadership of Ansar Allah, Abdulmalik al-Houthi, who demonstrated his commitment to progress at the talks throughout the consultations. I understand that he was in constant communication with his own delegation. The heads of both delegations, Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Yemany and speaker Mohammed Abdul-Salam, had a very difficult task, as is normally the case. But they led their delegations with professionalism, discipline and perseverance. It was not an easy exercise, but I thank them both for their outstanding performance.

I also thank Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, who, as members of the Council know, made a flying visit only yesterday to the talks at a crucial moment.

This outcome would not have happened without the considerable support and logistical arrangements to make the talks happen, and in particular from the Sultanate of Oman, the Kingdom of Kuwait and the Saudi-led coalition.

Last, but absolutely not least, allow me to place on record here my personal thanks for the leadership of the Secretary-General. As I have said to the Council before, Mr. Guterres is very familiar with the issues on Yemen and keeps us all very focused. We were in frequent contact the past two weeks in particular. His meeting in Buenos Aires at the Group of 20 with the Saudi Crown Prince ensured the last-minute clearances essential to move the 50 injured from Sana'a to Muscat just two days before the consultations. He took time out from his as-

ever arduous schedule in Europe to make a subsequent visit to the consultations themselves in Sweden from Wednesday night to Thursday night, for those vital last 24 hours, which was obviously instrumental in making the agreements happen. Naturally, I am most grateful for his leadership.

What did we achieve exactly? First, lest we forget, both parties turned up on time. The Government of Yemen had done that before, but they were now joined by the delegation from Sana'a, and that was no small achievement, given what had gone on before. Many people and Governments can claim credit for that, and I have already thanked them. But I am grateful also to the two delegations for arriving ready to work.

Proceedings in Sweden consisted of eight days of hard work. Meetings were punctual. The parties laboured daily on texts, as well as principles. What began as meetings of a formal nature became, over time, true engagements between people from both sides who know each other and seek agreement over difference. I would not want to overstate the level of confidence reached between the two sides at that first encounter, but they did business together, almost always in good spirits. But then more than mere attendance, of course, there were a range of agreements made — the details of which have all been published and are available to members of the Council. What are those agreements?

First, and most dramatically, the parties finally agreed to end the battles in Al-Hudaydah. For months, the Council has called for just such an agreement, and I believe we now have it. It entered into force upon publishing those papers on 13 December. It includes phased, but rapid, mutual withdrawals of forces from both the three Al-Hudaydah ports and the city. That will be achieved in the context of a governorate-wide ceasefire.

The United Nations was asked to monitor the compliance of the parties to those commitments. I am sure the Council will want to address that requirement. A robust and competent monitoring regime is not just essential, it is also urgently needed, and both parties have told us they would very much welcome it and, indeed, depend upon it. At the instruction of the Secretary-General, speaking himself from Sweden, I understand that the relevant departments in New York and elsewhere are already active on the planning for urgent deployment, subject to the decisions of the Council.

I should add, too, that I spoke only this afternoon to General Patrick Cammaert, who all members of the Council know, I am sure, for his exceptional achievements. He has kindly dropped his other responsibilities to lead the monitoring component of the agreement. We hope to see him out here in the region as soon as the middle of next week. Being present in the field soon is an essential part of the confidence that needs to go with the implementation of the agreement.

Al-Hudaydah has been the focus of international attention this year for a reason — not merely because it is the centre of gravity of the conflict, but also because it is the vital lifeline, as Mark Lowcock will no doubt remind us today, for the humanitarian programme upon which millions of Yemenis depend. The ghastly prospect of famine, of which Mr. Lowcock has reminded us, has made solving Al-Hudaydah and its propensity for battle both urgent and necessary.

For that reason, the precise nature of the design of the agreed withdrawals revolve around humanitarian needs and requirements. Therefore, allowing the United Nations the lead role in the ports, as a first step, is a vital response to that humanitarian requirement. We hope to see that happen within days. The United Nations will take on a leading role in supporting the Yemen Red Sea Ports Corporation in the management and inspections at the Al-Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Issa ports, which will include enhanced monitoring by the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism. The United Nations country team, under the leadership of my colleague and friend Lise Grande, has developed a plan to seek specific support from Member States to the port. Lise and her agency colleagues have been integral to shaping the agreements on Al-Hudaydah, and two of her colleagues were with us throughout the talks in Sweden. I am very grateful to her and to them for their presence. They will play a lead role in the civilian aspects of the deal.

But I would like to stress one important aspect of the Al-Hudaydah agreement. It is an outlier. Very deliberately, the arrangements agreed on, particularly as regards governance, and the temporary arrangements of governance, in Al-Hudaydah, intend to set no precedent for the future. They are time-bound. They do not confer any new sense of legitimacy or sovereignty. It is a humanitarian stop-gap to save lives and, we hope, turn the tide of war towards peace.

The parties have also reached a mutual understanding to ease the situation in Taiz, with the prospect of opening humanitarian corridors to allow the safe passage of goods and people across the front lines, the reduction of the fighting in the governorate and the deployment of demining operations. The parties in Sweden agreed to the establishment of a joint committee between themselves and the United Nations in the lead to secure negotiations on the agreements to make those objectives happen as soon as possible. We hope that the committee will meet soon and agree on a plan to bring some respite to the people of Taiz from the situation that they have suffered for many years.

Before arriving in Sweden, the parties, in the first agreement between them in the course of the entire conflict, had already agreed to the establishment of a joint committee to provide and plan for the mutual release of all prisoners. As I have said to the Council before, this was the first injunction to me when I took up these responsibilities by President Hadi Mansour, who urged the United Nations to focus on the release of prisoners, the important humanitarian nature of which is so clear. The committee, which was established, met frequently in Sweden, with the two sides exchanging lists of up to 15,000 prisoners. They were very lucky to have the full support and involvement and presence in Sweden of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). We hope, with the ICRC in the lead, for a mass exchange, as soon as mid-January, of up to 4,000 prisoners released and able to return to their families.

We did not reach agreement on all the items that were on the table in Sweden. We were not able to reach an agreement on the opening of Sana'a airport, and we were not able to reach agreement on the measures needed to improve the operations and reach of the Central Bank of Yemen as a condition for the full payment of the salaries of all civil servants. However, we will continue to work with the parties between sessions to seek agreement on those issues. Finally, but not least, the parties have agreed to reconvene at the end of January. This was a particular point raised by the Secretary-General with President Hadi Mansour when they spoke yesterday.

In Sweden, the parties finally also discussed my framework, elements of which I presented to the Council in June. The key principle of that framework, based on the three references — the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its implementation mechanism, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2216 (2015), is to restore State institutions and the State monopoly of force by providing a clear political future to all parties and to all those who have a say in resolving this conflict, and indeed to return Yemen to a state of civil politics and peace.

The parties have agreed to discuss this framework at the next round of consultations — ideally, as I have mentioned, before the end of January. I am very encouraged by this commitment. I am very pleased by the generally positive responses of the parties to this framework. I think it is fair to say that Ansar Allah is in agreement with the general tenor of all its elements. The Government of Yemen has some reservations, which I very much understand and respect. The next step will be serious consideration of the document and its implications. In this way, we hope to move from the essentially humanitarian theme of Sweden to a first serious consideration of the issues that need to be addressed between these parties if the conflict in Yemen is finally to be resolved.

I also come before the Council today with a call for caution. Our collective achievements this week were — I hope Council members will agree — a significant step forward, but what is in front of us is a daunting task. As ever in the context of such negotiations, one realizes at the end of negotiations that the hard work is only about to begin.

People ask us whether we can trust the parties to implement the agreements that they made together in Sweden. All of us no doubt have different views on this. My own is that this is not about whether we can trust one or the other on this or that commitment. This is about helping them both to make it happen, reporting on their success and noting those areas where they fall short of that. Therefore, verification is the key to building trust. I personally hope that the Council will play a part in keeping international attention on the minutiae of the implementation of these agreements.

Having said that, I can also confirm the public and private statements made to the Secretary-General by all involved at those consultations that the promises will not remain only on paper. We believe these statements. We have reason to believe them, and we all hope to see their promises reflected in the next days.

Before the consultations, I was asked by both sides whether the other side was serious. This is a frequent reference within the context of the conflict in Yemen,

but, frankly, I was not really sure until about two weeks ago. Today, I am more confident. However, more than this, what Sweden demonstrated each day was the existence of an absolute international consensus on the need for progress and on the simple proposition that only a political solution can resolve this conflict. Among us in Sweden were the representatives of those Governments accredited to the Government of Yemen. Their ambassadors were with us. They were in daily contact with the parties — the permanent members of the Council very prominent among them. Without their help, we would not have reached the point where we are today. This sense of international consensus and commitment was of great importance not just for the parties in Sweden, but also evidently for the people in Yemen, who are finding some small signs of hope for the future.

As the Swedish Foreign Minister said to the press at the closing of those consultations, no longer can Yemen be considered a forgotten war. Now we can begin to hope for a track that may lead to its early resolution.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Griffiths for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: A fortnight ago in Yemen, I got a glimpse of what life is like in the world's worst humanitarian crisis. I talked to families that had fled violence raging in their communities, some of them had been living for years under a plastic sheet. I met young mothers who had rushed desperately malnourished children to hospitals. For some, it was their second, third or even fourth visit, because their families could not afford the food or medicine to keep them well once they had been discharged.

So, I can confirm again what humanitarian agencies have known for a long time. A terrible tragedy is unfolding in Yemen and it is getting worse. Millions of people are starving, sick and desperate. They have one message for the world — this war needs to stop.

Council members have just heard Martin Griffiths describe the progress made this week in Sweden. For the first time in a long time, we can see a sign that perhaps things might start to get a bit better, but the people I met see no tangible improvement yet. This week's success must not lead to complacency; in fact, it must do the opposite. Commitments must be implemented. Working towards peace must be accelerated. In the meantime, millions of Yemenis still desperately need assistance and protection.

We have recently had further confirmation of just how bad the situation has become. Last week, a consortium of agencies published the *Integrated Food Security Phase Classification* (IPC) analysis for Yemen. Their report is the most detailed, rigorous food security survey ever conducted in the country. Data was collected in 330 of Yemen's 333 districts, analysed and scrutinized by multiple organizations and reviewed by independent Headquarters experts before publication. The results decisively confirm Yemen's descent toward famine. Even for experienced aid workers, the numbers are shocking. More than 20 million Yemenis — two-thirds of the population — are now food insecure. Ten million of them are severely food insecure — more than twice the number of four years ago. More than half the districts across the country have slipped into emergency conditions — nearly 60 per cent more than last year.

For the first time, the IPC document refers to what are called "Phase 5" conditions in Yemen. The technical term for Phase 5 is "catastrophe". It is characterized by extreme food gaps, very high malnutrition rates and excess mortality. Nearly a quarter of a million Yemenis are literally on the brink of starvation. The IPC is also clear that the war is the primary cause of this crisis. It is no coincidence that two-thirds of the people most at risk of starvation live in Hajjah, Al-Hudaydah, Sa'ada and Taiz. They are the places where the violence has been most intense this year.

As we have told the Council before, the economic crisis is also playing a major role. Yemenis' livelihoods and access to income have been decimated, and agricultural production has fallen by nearly a third. Those developments have left millions of more Yemenis unable to afford food and other essential goods, and food prices are 150 per cent higher than they were before the crisis.

If there is any good news in the IPC report, it is that humanitarian assistance — especially food aid or money to buy food — is having a major impact. It shows that millions of Yemenis are less hungry than they would be without aid. The IPC also tells us what areas and which people are worst affected. The United Nations and partners are rushing now to reach those people and prevent the catastrophe from spreading. We will also do more survey work on an ongoing basis so we can spot the most vulnerable before it is too late.

Since October, I have been seeking the Council's support for five measures to prevent famine from taking hold. Those five steps are more urgent than ever. So where do we stand on them today?

The first is a cessation of hostilities. Up to now, we have seen only a reduction in fighting in some areas, not a full cessation. In the past week, nearly 450 conflict incidents were reported across Yemen, about a third of them in Al-Hudaydah. The agreement on Al-Hudaydah that Martin just described brings us closer to a real cessation. As the details are being worked out, we continue to call for a full cessation of hostilities across the country.

The second point is to protect the supply of food and essential goods and to facilitate aid operations. That means keeping all the ports open, easing entry and movement restrictions, protecting humanitarian supplies and facilitating aid workers in doing their jobs. Restrictions on humanitarian access are a serious and growing problem. I had a useful discussion in Aden with the Prime Minister on imports. Last month, the Government of Yemen lifted restrictions on food imports introduced through Decree 75. In November, food imports through the ports of Al-Hudaydah and Saleef, where most food enters the country, rose by 15 per cent, although the total quantity remained below what was needed.

We also call on the Government to lift restrictions on fuel imports, which are needed to power hospital generators and keep water networks running and for other critical tasks across the country. Those restrictions are currently blocking over 70,000 tons of fuel from entering Al-Hudaydah port. I had a constructive discussion with the Prime Minister on that, and I hope to see positive action soon.

Operations at Aden port, where congestion has been a severe problem, have also started to improve after the Government instructed port authorities to accelerate processing times following my discussions with the Prime Minster. We hope that trend continues. As an immediate step, we want to see the release of some 1,400 containers belonging to the World Food Programme that have been stuck at Aden port for months.

The Red Sea Mills in Al-Hudaydah, which I have talked about repeatedly over the past three months, are an instructive example. Access to the mills has been impossible since fighting escalated around them in September. Fighters have regularly impinged upon the compound, and the site has been repeatedly struck by mortar fire. Early last month, the mills came under the control of Government-backed forces, but access since then has been hampered by difficulties in moving across front lines and concerns that the area — potentially including the entrance to the mills — may have been mined.

Because of all that, enough food to feed nearly 3.5 million people for a month has now sat useless in a warehouse for more than three months. I discussed the issue both with the operators of the mills in Sana'a and with coalition authorities in Riyadh, but as of today we have no idea if the Red Sea Mills can still operate or how much of the donor-funded grain inside has been damaged or spoiled.

The Red Sea Mills are just one site among a very large number of mills, silos and warehouses located in and around Al-Hudaydah. If those sites are hit or damaged, aid operations could very quickly grind to a halt. That is one reason why the progress Martin has described concerning Al-Hudaydah is so important, and why we must all do everything we can to make sure that it translates into action.

In Sana'a, I raised my serious concerns about the restrictions and bureaucratic impediments that humanitarian organizations face, including delays in visas, customs and the registration of non-governmental organizations and unacceptable interference with humanitarian operations. I raised those issues with senior representatives of the de facto authorities, including the President of the Supreme Political Council. Those were constructive discussions, but I have since heard worrying reports that a raft of new restrictions has been introduced, especially for protection activities. Some of those restrictions have come from local authorities and not from the Sana'a level. Based on the firm assurances I received during my visit, I hope that de facto authorities in Sana'a will move quickly to lift those and other restrictions. I am following up on the assurances that I was given.

In all my conversations in Yemen, I also sought commitments from all parties to ensure that fighters stay away from hospitals and other civilian sites and that no armed forces recruit children. Greater commitment is needed on all sides for the protection of civilians, especially women and girls, in this crisis.

The third area is stabilizing the economy. Foreign currency injections over the past two months from the

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have been effective in stabilizing the exchange rate, financing imports of essential goods and starting to pay pensions and civil servant salaries. At present, the Yemeni rial is trading at just over 500 to the dollar, which represents a marked appreciation compared to a few weeks ago. But a dollar still costs more than twice as many rials as it did before the current conflict, and research indicates that the exchange rate needs to come down to about 440 rial to the dollar before it will have a wider impact on people's ability to afford food and other essential goods.

To achieve that, as well as to finance imports, pay salaries and pensions and meet minimum costs reliably, the Government of Yemen is going to need billions of dollars in external support for its budget in 2019. Again, I had constructive discussions with the Prime Minister on that. We are seeing some progress in paying pensions and payment of some civil servant salaries on both sides. However, as yesterday's statement of the International Monetary Fund made clear, we need more decisions and more sustained action in a similar vein. Otherwise, what we will see is that recent progress, which is improving some people's ability to buy food and other essential goods, will simply be lost again.

The fourth area is funding for the United Nations response plan. Agencies are moving now to expand operations. We believe that next year we will need to feed 12 million people every month, including 10 million severely food-insecure people and 2 million displaced people in acute need. That figure of 12 million is a 50 per cent increase over this year. In total, we plan to assist 15 million people — that is half the population. That includes programmes to roll back cholera and water-borne diseases, address malnutrition and improve living conditions for the most vulnerable displaced people.

To ensure that all the food, medicine, household items and other supplies, as well as the aid workers, reach their destinations quickly and safely, our logistics programme must also be financed to expand significantly. That will all require a lot more money. The 2019 United Nations humanitarian response plan is costed ay $4 billion; about half of that is for emergency food assistance. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates recently pledged to provide another $500 million for humanitarian aid in Yemen. That is on top of their joint contribution of $930 million to the United Nations appeal this year. Our understanding is that most of this new money will be channelled through next year's United Nations coordinated humanitarian response plan. That would be a boost to our fund raising, and we hope that it will jump-start contributions from other countries. On 26 February, the Secretary-General will convene a high-level pledging conference in Geneva, co-hosted by the Governments of Switzerland and Sweden.

The fifth area is the most important, and that is for the parties to continue to engage seriously with Martin's process, including implementing the agreements reached in Sweden.

The five points I have been emphasizing are, to remind the Council, a package and not a menu. We need more action on all of them. Notwithstanding the good news from Sweden, there is a long way to go. Earlier today, I chaired another detailed discussion on Yemen with the heads of all the key United Nations and other operational humanitarian agencies. Our collective assessment is that the good news we heard this week has not yet had any material impact on the millions of people who need assistance. Access, the economy and resources are major priorities. The lesson is twofold — progress is absolutely possible but we need much more of it right now. So, I again ask for practical and political support from the Council in the five areas I have outlined.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to welcome the new Yemeni representative to the Council. This is a good day for all of Yemen. I want to congratulate and commend Mr. Griffiths and his team for the work they have done to bring about these developments. But, as Mr. Griffiths himself said, we should also thank and commend the Swedish Government, the parties themselves, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, President Hadi and the representatives of the Governments of Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Oman. My Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt was very pleased to have been able to join his Swedish counterpart in Stockholm for these important developments. Above all, I want to stress how much we owe to Mr. Griffiths and his team and, of course, to the Secretary-General. If I may say so, this is what the United Nations is for. The Council's united support

has helped Mr. Griffiths and the United Nations get to this point.

I will speak briefly today because I think we all have important work to do now to support Mr. Griffiths. I will comment on Mr. Lowcock's remarks afterwards. I was struck by what Mr. Griffiths said about trust among the parties and about international consensus. For the first time in two years, the people of Yemen have been put first, and we commend all the parties for taking that important step. We recognize their leadership and we endorse the agreements they have reached, but Mr. Griffiths' cautions about it being a humanitarian stopgap are very well taken.

I want to refer now to what Mr. Lowcock said about the humanitarian situation on the ground. It is a very sobering reminder of the human consequences still at stake and of how many starving, sick and desperate people remain in the most vulnerable of situations. We therefore have no time to lose. As Mr. Lowcock said, we need to bring about tangible improvements for the people of Yemen, and we need to do that as swiftly as we can.

I thank the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland for agreeing to hold a pledging conference. Mr. Lowcock set out an update on his five asks and defined them. We support that. As the penholder, the United Kingdom will resume work on the draft resolution with all of our colleagues. We plan to endorse the agreements reached, support their implementation and set out urgent next steps. As requested, we will work to address the monitoring requirements with colleagues. We welcome the news about General Cammaert. That is an extremely good step forward. We understand the importance of monitoring compliance and of the United Nations having a leading role in supporting the ports. We hope to be able to work expeditiously with colleagues to bring about a draft resolution that will give the firmest possible support what has been achieved so far and provide Mr. Griffiths and the parties with a solid foundation as they move towards the end of January agreement and framework. We wish him the best of luck with that.

It is vital that the parties that have made such good strides thus far continue to act in good faith and take urgent steps to fully implement those agreements. I would ask all colleagues on the Council to join me in pledging that the Council will do its very best to stay united and to work tirelessly, together with partners throughout the United Nations membership, to support what has been achieved and advance the work to the desperately needed next stage.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for, their valuable briefings. I would also like to welcome the new Representative of Yemen, His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Al-Saadi, whom I wish every success.

In my statement I will focus on two main topics: first, the consultations in Sweden between the Yemeni parties; and secondly, developments in the humanitarian and economic situation in Yemen.

On the first topic, we listened with great interest to the briefing of Mr. Griffiths, which delivers a message of hope with a view to mitigating the scale of the crisis that has beset Yemen since 2014. The round of consultations between the Yemeni parties — hosted by the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden, which we thank for providing all the necessary elements for its success — is a reflection of the international community's commitment and concern to address that crisis, which has reached regrettable proportions and threatens regional peace and security. It also resulted in negative consequences for the humanitarian, economic, and political situations in brotherly Yemen.

The relative and noticeable progress achieved in that round of consultations should be considered a great success in the light of the Yemeni crisis and its circumstances. That progress would not have been achieved without such key factors as the unity of the Security Council vis-à-vis the Yemeni issue, as well as the great role played by the coalition countries through their legitimate support for efforts to overcome all obstacles to the convening of those consultations, not to mention the serious commitment of Yemeni stakeholders to actively engaging in them and cooperating with the Special Envoy.

The State of Kuwait has been supporting efforts to resolve conflicts through peaceful means and mediation, all the more so given that the United Nations role as mediator. We believe in the utmost importance of the United Nations and the resolutions taken by its various organs, especially the Security Council as the responsible organ for the maintenance of international peace and security.

In the light of all this, and given that the solution to the crisis in Yemen must be a political one, the State of Kuwait provided a private plane to transport most of the Yemeni delegation from the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, to Sweden in order to participate in the recent consultations. We hope that all Yemeni parties will invest in the outcome of those consultations and complete the steps specified hereto in order to achieve a comprehensive agreement that will eventually end the disastrous repercussions of the crisis faced by brotherly Yemen.

On the second topic, developments in the humanitarian and economic situation in Yemen, the consultations in Sweden did not lead to a compromise regarding all issues that were discussed there. However, there has been agreement on the port and city of Al-Hudaydah, as well as a declaration of understanding on Taiz. Moreover, an agreement was reached on an implementation mechanism for the exchange of prisoners, which will help to address the adverse humanitarian impact on the brotherly Yemeni people.

The port and the city of Al-Hudaydah exemplify the aggravated difficult humanitarian situation. We believe that the staged agreement reached would, if implemented, lead to a ceasefire and the mutual redeployment of forces to areas outside the ports and cities, allowing the United Nations greater freedom of movement to ensure the safe arrival of humanitarian aid without being impeded or looted as before. Undoubtedly, the agreement would also facilitate the arrival of commodities and commercial goods. The United Nations would scale up its Verification and Inspection Mechanism in that regard.

It is important that revenues from the three ports be channelled to the Central Bank in Al-Hudaydah in order to pay the salaries of civil servants throughout Yemen. That would have a positive impact and alleviate the difficult economic repercussions of the crisis while improving the exchange rate of the national currency, which has recently risen to and stabilized at 450 rials to the dollar.

The Yemeni city of Taiz has endured a painful siege for the past three years. Its inhabitants have suffered deplorable circumstances. We hope that the declaration of understanding reached by the Yemeni parties will end the negative impacts of the siege and spare its inhabitants the risks of the humanitarian crisis. We also hope that Yemeni parties will be seriously committed to implementing the outcomes of the consultations held in Sweden, insofar as that will be a key factor in alleviating the humanitarian suffering and crystallize the efforts of the international community and the important donors towards supporting the humanitarian situation.

Brotherly Yemen looks to the international community and the Security Council to support the positive tangible results of the consultations reached in Sweden. Those results have specific features and will constitute the bedrock of future consultations, to be held early next year. The Council must maintain its consensus-based spirit concerning Yemen, reflecting its unity and ensuring that no messages may be misinterpreted by any Yemeni party.

To conclude, we reiterate our support for the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths. We underline the importance of his efforts to end the crisis in Yemen being based on the three political terms of reference, namely, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its implementation mechanism, the outcomes of the National Dialogue and the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2216 (2015). That would ensure the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen, as well as non-interference in Yemen's domestic affairs.

Mrs. Haley (United States): I thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, for their briefings.

For millions of people around the world, this is a season of hope. This is the time of year that brings out the idealist in many of us. We are reminded that we are all — every one of us — flawed and fallen human beings. But we see a light in the darkness, and we hope that our best instincts can triumph over our worst. It is difficult to imagine more convincing proof of humankind's worst instincts than the pictures coming out of Yemen today. They show innocent children and babies slowly starving to death and succumbing to disease. I will be honest. This may be the season of hope, but hope alone does not make us feel better when we see the pictures of suffering in Yemen. The world's worst humanitarian crisis demands more than hope from the Security Council that peace will come to Yemen. It demands that we take action to hold all the warring parties accountable. It demands that we

address the Iranian aggression at the root of the crisis. It demands that life-saving assistance reach the Yemeni women and children who are suffering the most from the conflict.

Special Envoy Griffiths has brought us encouraging news. We congratulate him on convening the parties in the Yemen conflict and bringing them together, face to face, for negotiations for the first time since 2016. Those talks have produced concrete outcomes, including an agreement for a prisoner exchange. The progress made in Sweden should build on the political will that is necessary for more progress in the future. We welcome the willingness of all parties, including Saudi Arabia, to participate in those confidence-building measures. Most hopeful of all is the news of the ceasefire around the port city of Al-Hudaydah. The success of that ceasefire is critical to addressing the acute, immediate need for humanitarian assistance in Yemen. All parties, including the coalition, must exercise restraint in line with the ceasefire. It is critical that the ceasefire hold in order to allow the space for continued conversations. We expect that in the coming days, the parties will begin withdrawing forces, in accordance with the agreement.

The ceasefire agreement calls for weekly reports to the Security Council. Those reports must show continued political progress and the commitment of all parties. The members of the Security Council will be monitoring that situation very closely. We must be ready to act if one or more of the parties fails to follow through. The next step is to expand the ceasefire to include the entire city of Al-Hudaydah. We call on all the parties to take that step and to show the world they are serious about achieving peace in Yemen. Ultimately, the success of the ceasefire must lead to an agreement on the Special Envoy's framework for a final political settlement. That is the outcome towards which all the confidence-building measures and negotiations are directed — a realistic political framework for peace in Yemen. And the Security Council should not stop focusing on this conflict until that is delivered.

In this season of hope, the international community does not have to be satisfied just with hope for the people of Yemen. We have the ability to change their reality. Human beings created this crisis; human beings can end it. Life and death are on the line, and we are not powerless. We call on all of our colleagues in the Security Council to take the next step to build on what has begun and define the basic political will to save lives — the lives of millions — and bring about peace in Yemen.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for today's updates. I would also like to welcome the new Permanent Representative of Yemen. It must be rewarding for him to participate in his first Security Council meeting on a day of hope.

Yesterday marked an important day. The agreements reached in Stockholm can be the breakthrough that is needed for peace and to end the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. As others have said, our efforts must now turn to immediate implementation and maintaining momentum in the political process. Let me express our very deep appreciation for the extraordinary efforts of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths in that endeavour. We also truly commend the personal engagement of the Secretary-General himself — an illustration of the strong international commitment to the crisis in Yemen and of the urgent need to find political solutions. We also thank those who played a crucial role in making the agreements happen, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman and the Ambassadors accredited to Yemen, including those of the permanent members of the Council. Without intense preparations and active international support, the consultations in Stockholm would never have been possible.

But most of all, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Yemeni delegations. Their decision to come together for the first time in more than two years was a significant step towards ending the conflict. As we have just heard, crucial agreements were reached on several issues. Most important was the agreement on a ceasefire in Al-Hudaydah, with a mutual redeployment of forces and a neutral management of the port. Its implementation is now urgent, not least to address the desperate humanitarian situation in Al-Hudaydah and in other parts of the country.

The understanding reached to ease the tensions in Taiz, including with a view to allow for humanitarian corridors and demining, was also important. We fully support the efforts to find an agreement to open Sana'a's airport and to enable the exchange of prisoners, which would constitute important humanitarian measures and build further confidence. Reaching an agreement to continue the dialogue on economic issues is another

essential element. And finally, the commitment to continuing to engage on a negotiating framework will be critical to the important process ahead.

The atmospherics at the talks in Stockholm bode well for moving forward, but as we have just heard, today the situation in Yemen is still the world's worst humanitarian crisis. As the United Nations-led consultations have progressed, fighting, which has included civilian casualties, has continued in many parts of Yemen and the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, with an increased risk of widespread famine, as outlined by Mr. Lowcock today.

The Stockholm agreement must therefore be urgently translated into concrete action. The Council should come together to support and fully back its implementation. Very much in line with what the representative of the United Kingdom has just outlined, we would like to see a draft resolution swiftly prepared in support of the agreement that includes the United Nations monitoring of the ceasefire in Al-Hudaydah.

We must also continue to fully support — in practical and political terms — the "asks" made by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to alleviate the suffering and prevent widespread famine. The upcoming high-level pledging conference early next year provides a key opportunity for the international community to demonstrate its commitment to the Yemeni people.

The constructive engagement with United Nations efforts by all sides must also continue in order to make progress on the issues that are still pending. We welcome that the parties plan to meet again by the end of January, and we hope to see further progress even before then on the issues left open, as indicated by Special Envoy Martin Griffiths this morning, including on the economy and the Sana'a airport.

We encourage the parties to continue discussions in the same spirit of dialogue and compromise demonstrated during the meeting in Stockholm earlier this week. We appreciate the Special Envoy's efforts to increase the representation of women in the political process, and we commend the Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group for their important contribution. In future rounds of talks, however, further efforts are needed to ensure the full and effective participation of women in this process.

In conclusion, we are honoured to have hosted of the United Nations-led consultations in Stockholm. We truly hope that this will mark the turning point for peace in Yemen. We will continue to play an active role in support of sustained United Nations efforts in Yemen. The people of Yemen must now see the concrete benefits of the agreements. It cannot be that we celebrate a diplomatic breakthrough on paper and people continue to suffer.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings, which provide us with a comprehensive update after the Stockholm discussions.

I would like to start by joining my voice to those of the other members of the Security Council to commend the outstanding efforts and commitment of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, who convinced the parties to gather around the negotiating table and successfully complete the Stockholm discussions in a truly constructive spirit. Let me also enthusiastically thank the Secretary-General for his personal commitment, which really made the difference, as Mr. Griffiths said.

France welcomes the commitment of the parties, which has made it possible to achieve these initial positive results. We warmly thank the Swedish Government for hosting these talks, and all regional and international partners that supported the discussions.

The holding of these talks is in itself an important first step. Decisive progress has been made on three fronts: the exchange of 4,000 prisoners, a withdrawal of the armed forces from the port and city of Al-Hudaydah in the coming days — and a ceasefire throughout the province — and, finally, the establishment of a mechanism for de-escalation at Taiz. The agreement on Al-Hudaydah, in particular, is essential to progress on the path towards a comprehensive cessation of hostilities. Its implementation must have a positive impact on the whole country, by facilitating the humanitarian response that Mark Lowcock has just stressed as absolutely necessary.

The significant progress achieved in Stockholm is potentially a breakthrough that can mark the turning point towards the end of the Yemeni conflict. The Stockholm talks show that peace is possible in Yemen. Their full implementation requires the firm commitment

of all and the unity of the Security Council in support of Martin Griffiths.

This progress should not obscure the fact that the Yemeni people are still facing an emergency humanitarian situation, which is my second point. And I would like to thank Mark Lowcock and his teams for their exemplary work and for their absolutely clear message. While Yemen is experiencing, as Mark Lowcock just pointed out, the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, with more than 22 million people dependent on humanitarian assistance, or nearly 75 per cent of the population, and a still very high risk of famine, the positive momentum at work in Stockholm must now be translated into reality. We call on all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular with regard to the protection of civilians. We also call on them to respect human rights. France will be both active and vigilant on this subject.

The discussions also allowed progress to be made on other crucial issues, such as the reopening of Sana'a airport and the implementation of economic measures to restore the country's economy. We hope that these discussions can continue very soon on these points, which must converge to create the momentum we are looking for. It is essential that the progress made in Stockholm quickly has a beneficial impact on the ground for the populations in order to create and maintain this impetus towards peace. We call on all States in a position to do so to continue to use their influence to help ensure that all parties comply with the guidelines that have been defined.

In this context, and this is my last point, it is more essential than ever to respond to the requests made by Mark Lowcock and Martin Griffiths. Only a political solution will be able to ensure lasting peace and put an end to the ongoing humanitarian disaster in Yemen. We therefore call for further political discussions to be held as soon as possible in order to build on the momentum generated in Stockholm without delay. In this context, we believe it is important for the Security Council to put all its weight in the balance. Our meeting today demonstrates the strong unity of the Security Council. Let us use it without delay as a lever for action in support of the ongoing efforts.

That is why we are ready to work now with the United Kingdom as penholder on an updated draft resolution, to express our support for the efforts of Martin Griffiths and the important results achieved in Stockholm, but also to respond to the humanitarian emergency by endorsing Mark Lowcock's requests. I would like to echo what my British colleague has just said on this point. This draft resolution will mark the unity of the Council and the international community in support of United Nations humanitarian and political action. We are ready to move very quickly on the subject because, as my British colleague said, we have no time to lose. Be assured, Mr. President, of France's full mobilization in this regard, in support of United Nations mediation and in conjunction with all interlocutors in the region.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the President for convening today's meeting and Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their very important briefings.

We would like to express our appreciation for the efforts they are making in their respective and complementary fields of action, bringing all parties closer to an inclusive political solution to the conflict in Yemen and addressing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today. We believe that their work should receive the strongest and most unanimous support of the international community, including that of the Security Council.

We would like to welcome the recent understandings reached, such as the valuable support and commitment to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. We would also like to stress the need to maintain the momentum generated at the meeting held in Stockholm. We join others in highlighting the role played by the host country, Sweden, and the important participation of Secretary-General António Guterres. We would especially like to pay special tribute to the Yemeni parties for the specific commitments they have made and emphasize the urgency of implementing them and giving priority to the attention required by more than 14 million Yemenis exposed to imminent famine.

It is critical to strictly comply with the ceasefire agreed at the ports of Saleef, Ras Issa and especially Al-Hudaydah, which Mr. Griffiths has called the "centre of gravity" of the conflict. We also emphasize the understanding reached in relation to Taiz — another urban centre severely affected by the conflict.

In view of the continuation of the talks in January, we encourage the parties to continue to build trust. We believe that the exchange of prisoners should be followed by other actions, such as the full opening of

Sana'a airport. We welcome the transparency shown in Sweden, which should allow the international community, and the Council in particular, to monitor and to support the implementation of the agreements reached and promote greater confidence among all parties in the peace process.

The withdrawal of forces from Al-Hudaydah and the leading oversight role that the United Nations will play in those efforts require the prompt adoption of a Council resolution. We would like to express our appreciation to the delegation of the United Kingdom for its diligence in dealing with that matter and to underline the importance of keeping the Council united around the priority that should be given to the protection of the civilian population.

We consider it vital that the international community, in particular the neighbouring countries, increase their contributions towards stabilizing and revitalizing the local economy, since factors such as inflation and the devaluation of the currency significantly increase the risk of famine.

We emphasize that achieving sustainable peace will require broad consensus around a shared vision for the future. In that regard, it is essential that the process be inclusive and that all sectors of the Yemeni population be represented. We particularly encourage a greater participation of women and young people.

In conclusion, I emphasize that today, we have reason to be optimistic. However, we must also exercise caution because, while a turning point that allows us to glimpse a better future has been reached, the reality today is that there is much to be done to end the suffering of millions of Yemenis, as we heard in today's briefings. Peru will continue to support the efforts to achieve a political solution in Yemen that puts an end to the serious humanitarian crisis.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their informative briefings. Our special thanks go to the Special Envoy for his tireless efforts to resume the political dialogue between the parties to the conflict. He has our full support in all his endeavours.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Allow me to welcome the Permanent Representative of Yemen and to wish him every success.

(*spoke in English*)

During our last briefing on the situation in Yemen in November (see S/PV.8404), we all agreed that a window of opportunity to relaunch a credible political process had presented itself and that it was vital to take full advantage of it in order to restore peace and stability in Yemen. We are encouraged by the positive developments that followed that meeting, especially the first round of consultations between the parties in Rimbo. We thank the Government of Sweden and all other countries that contributed to making that conference happen. We commend the agreement on the exchange of prisoners and the statement of understanding on Taiz. Most importantly, we welcome with enthusiasm the agreement on the cessation of hostilities across Al-Hudaydah governorate and in the ports of Al-Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Isa. We consider that arrangement to be a major achievement, as it has the potential to lead to the much-needed reopening of the humanitarian corridors.

Poland strongly believes that the outcomes of consultations in Rimbo are the first significant step towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict. It is vital that the parties now deliver on the commitments made in Sweden. We encourage them to take advantage of that progress to continue to build trust, as well as to carry on their engagement with the Special Envoy, in order to pave the way for the resumption of formal peace negotiations. We look forward to the next round of consultations in January. In that vein, we would like to underscore the need to include underrepresented groups, including women and young people, in the political process.

We strongly believe that the support of the international community, and especially the Security Council, is also essential to increase the prospect of peace in Yemen. We therefore stand ready to engage with our partners in the Council on the draft resolution that is to be presented by the United Kingdom.

Although we greatly welcome the progress on the political track, there are still major challenges that need to be addressed in the weeks to come, including the reopening of Sana'a airport and measures to improve the economic situation. We must also remember that the humanitarian situation still requires urgent action, including by implementing the five asks presented by Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock. The grave risk of a widespread famine in Yemen will not be

reduced until unhindered and sustainable deliveries of humanitarian assistance are guaranteed. That is why the swift and full implementation of the cessation of hostilities in Al-Hudaydah is of paramount importance.

To conclude, the consultations in Sweden have proved that despite significant differences, a political dialogue between the parties is possible. There is hope for Yemen. There is hope for improvement of the security situation in the country and for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The window of opportunity is still open.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): Let me first welcome the new Permanent Representative of Yemen to the Security Council and to wish him success in his new function. We thank Martin Griffiths and Mark Lowcock for their informative briefings. They presented us with a message of hope but also one of continued extreme human suffering on the ground. That human suffering should strengthen our resolve to take action in the Council.

The agreement between the parties, particularly on a cessation of hostilities across Al-Hudaydah governorate, is an important spark of hope for the people of Yemen. Yet the threat of famine in Yemen remains unchanged, as Mr. Lowcock just mentioned. That means that the need for urgent action from all of us persists in order not only to support what has been achieved in Sweden but also to address urgent concerns on the ground. In that context, I will focus on three issues: first, the consultations between the parties; secondly, the threat of famine; and, thirdly, the urgent need for the Council to follow up.

On my first point, we welcome the constructive participation of the parties involved in the consultations in Sweden. Like other speakers, we commend the efforts of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths in bringing that about, as well as the unwavering support and involvement of the Secretary-General. We thank our Swedish colleagues for successfully hosting and facilitating those consultations, as well as the many other countries that contributed to making those talks happen, particularly Yemen.

The cessation of hostilities throughout Al-Hudaydah governorate is a much-needed concrete result. Once implemented, that will greatly benefit the ongoing humanitarian efforts. We also welcome the progress regarding the exchange of prisoners and the humanitarian corridors into Taiz. However, the lack of women in the delegations in Sweden is deeply regrettable, particularly after the clear calls made by the international community to address that ahead of the consultations.

The parties now need to capitalize on what they have achieved, put their words into action and create a conducive environment for talks to resume in January. More work needs to be done with regard to the reopening of Sana'a airport, measures to address the economy and, above all else, a framework for a sustainable, peaceful political solution with the involvement of women.

That brings me to my second point — the persistent threat of famine in Yemen. Regardless of the positive developments in Sweden, the humanitarian crisis remains as alarming as it was two weeks ago. The five asks of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to the parties and the international community remain as pertinent as ever. Already, tens of thousands of innocent Yemenis have died of completely avoidable causes, and those staggering numbers will increase exponentially if the cessation of hostilities in Al-Hudaydah does not hold. We have reached a point at which any delay is inexcusable. We need concrete follow-up by the international community.

First of all, we support the further involvement of the United Nations system in the implementation of the agreements. We commend the tasking of Patrick Cammaert with monitoring the implementation of the agreement, as Mr. Martin Griffiths just mentioned, and we express our full confidence in him. He is the right person for the job.

The Security Council should also take action. We therefore welcome and strongly support the United Kingdom's initiative to back up what has been achieved in Sweden with a draft resolution, which should back up the agreement on a cessation of hostilities across Al-Hudaydah governorate, put humanitarian access front and centre and include OCHA's five asks. Let us adopt a draft resolution as soon as possible next week. As Mark Lowcock said, humanitarian funding is crucial, so we thank Switzerland and Sweden for organizing a pledging conference to be held in February 2019.

In conclusion, despite those positive developments, we remain extremely concerned about the millions of Yemeni people on the brink of starvation. It is the responsibility of the Council to support the Special Envoy's efforts, as well as to urgently address the humanitarian crisis. The Council has a huge

responsibility to help end the suffering of the people of Yemen as soon as possible. Let me end my statement by quoting Mark Lowcock: "This war has to stop now".

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): I join others in thanking Special Envoy Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their clear and comprehensive updates, and commend them both for their efforts to bring about a political and humanitarian solution in Yemen. They can rest assured of our full support in all their undertakings. My delegation is closely following the recent developments, and I would like to make two points today.

First, Kazakhstan welcomes the political consultations in Sweden and urges all parties to continue to engage in good faith and without preconditions in the political process led by the Special Envoy. We are encouraged by the fact that the consultations took place successfully and by the confidence-building measures announced, including the exchange of prisoners, and we hope that this will move Yemen a step closer to peace. We believe that the Stockholm declaration — in particular with regard to the agreement on the city and port of Al-Hudaydah and the ports of Saleef and Ras Isa; the joint committee for initiating an agreement on the exchange of prisoners; and the mutual understanding concerning Taiz — will have a huge impact on both the security and humanitarian situation in Yemen. The implementation of the agreement is crucial because Al-Hudaydah is the centre of gravity of the war in Yemen. The ceasefire and withdrawal of all forces from the port and then from the city will allow for the opening of the humanitarian corridors to the city of Taiz, which are important to the survival of those people in Yemen who are in need of humanitarian aid.

Secondly, we emphasize that all obligations under international humanitarian law must be respected by all parties, who must take responsibility to mitigate the humanitarian situation by fully cooperating with the United Nations and the relevant humanitarian agencies. Kazakhstan joins others in urging all to refrain from damaging critical civilian infrastructure, violence and indiscriminate bombings that could inflict mass casualties on innocent civilians. It is also necessary to address inflation-related issues. The cessation of hostilities will provide an opportunity to revive the economy, resolve the humanitarian crisis and restore basic public services to the population of Yemen. That is the best way to give those and future consultations a chance to succeed.

Finally, Kazakhstan expresses its unconditional support for the Special Envoy's efforts to achieve a negotiated political settlement through inclusive intra-Yemeni dialogue, with the involvement of the international community, especially the countries of the region.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia): Let me first welcome the new Permanent Representative of Yemen. We wish him every success in his endeavours.

We thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for requesting this meeting, and we are most grateful for the briefings by Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock.

For the first time in more than two years, the Yemeni parties have made some real, albeit limited, progress towards peace and stability in the consultations in Stockholm, facilitated by the United Nations. We can certainly welcome the agreements reached on Al-Hudaydah, the establishment, a governorate-wide ceasefire, the humanitarian corridor for Taiz and the agreement on the exchange of prisoners. We welcome the agreement of the parties to discuss a negotiating framework at their next meeting. Those are certainly all concrete developments. They offer a real sense of hope, for almost the first time, for the millions of Yemenis who continue to suffer from the consequences of the conflict. Encouragingly, what has been achieved in Stockholm demonstrates what can be done when there is a genuine political commitment.

Those consultations are the result of the prolonged and concerted efforts of many actors. We appreciate the Yemeni parties, which have engaged seriously and positively in the talks. We are profoundly grateful for the tireless diplomatic efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, and thankful to Sweden for hosting the meeting, the countries of the region and all others who have contributed. We commend all their contributions. It is, at last, a start.

The next stage — the implementation of the agreements reached in Stockholm — is obviously critical. It will require the parties to continue to work together and, equally important, to refrain from any action that could undermine progress. This is a situation that provides the opportunity for the international community to demonstrate its support for the parties to honour their agreements and to insist absolutely that they do just that. The Council must speak with

one voice. The parties must sustain their constructive engagement with the Special Envoy.

The revitalization of the political process is certainly a very positive development and most welcome, but the humanitarian crisis remains, which is of the very deepest concern. Millions are on the verge of famine. The economy of Yemen is collapsing. It requires the total rebuilding of key State institutions and facilities, as well as urgent and continued stabilization measures. The scaling up of financial support for a humanitarian response is now a total necessity, as Mr. Lowcock underlined after visit his two weeks ago. The only way to avert a humanitarian catastrophe of almost unimaginable proportions is urgent and concerted international effort. There are no alternatives left. It is essential that we support the United Nations and its humanitarian partners fully and completely. The measure of progress must be seen in action on the ground. It is imperative that life-saving supplies reach the millions of people in desperate need and that safe passage be provided for distribution. That will be the real measure of success in Yemen.

Stockholm has been a very important step forward, but now we must maintain the momentum and ensure that the parties engage in the next round of consultations, both to sustain the political process and to address the humanitarian crisis. As my Prime Minister recently underlined in a letter addressed to the Yemeni parties, it is only the language of dialogue that can end the unspeakable suffering of the people of Yemen. That is what the people of Yemen expect and deserve, and we must provide it for them. In the past, there have been a number of ceasefires and agreements. We must now throw the whole weight of the international community behind persuading the warring sides to de-escalate the fighting.

In conclusion, the continued diplomatic efforts of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths have our full support, as do the United Nations and its humanitarian partners, in their work to deliver aid for all Yemenis in need. We call on the Council to show its full support for both the political process and the humanitarian work of the United Nations in order to demonstrate its own unity of purpose to bring an end to the suffering of the people of Yemen.

Mr. Elé Ela (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I welcome the presence among us of Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and thank them for the informative, clear and comprehensive briefings that they have just delivered on the most recent developments and hopes for peace in the Yemeni conflict.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea wishes to express its satisfaction at the initial success of the meeting held in the Swedish city of Rimbo between 6 and 13 of this month, and thanks the Government of Sweden, through its representative, for having hosted that important meeting. We also wish to thank the delegation of Yemen for having attended that meeting, as well as the United Nations and other international stakeholders that either directly or indirectly made it possible to convene that important meeting.

Three months after the Geneva meeting, which failed to gather all of the relevant parties to the conflict, and just a few weeks before the end of the year, we have finally received information that gives hope to the victims in Yemen and the international community regarding the future of the country. We believe that this has been an important step in allowing real progress to be made towards future talks to put an end to the conflict.

However, our experience of international politics and this very Council urges caution and vigilance. It is now vital that all parties directly or indirectly involved in the conflict come together to work towards implementing the minimum agreed terms of this initial phase of peace talks, including a ceasefire in the entire western province of Al-Hudaydah, a prisoner exchange agreement and the withdrawal of troops from the said disputed port city, among other measures. From the outset of our meetings on the matter, we have all called for the cessation of hostilities in Al-Hudaydah and its surrounding area, owing to the strategic importance of its port for humanitarian operations. Now that that has been granted by the consensus of all national parties, we hope that it will be meticulously respected by all parties involved in the Yemeni conflict.

We hope that the session of consultations that concluded yesterday in Sweden will be the beginning of an irreversible solution to the differences that divide the parties in Yemen today, in order to save its people of Yemen a conflict that has denied them of their human dignity and means of subsistence, such as water, food, electricity, infrastructure and other services, in addition

to an already destroyed economy that has brought the country to its knees and left it rudderless. In that regard, it is important that this new process and any possible actions of the Council take into account the five proposals made by Mr. Mark Lowcock to alleviate the desperate humanitarian situation.

Finally, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea wishes to express its full support for the efforts of the United Nations in Yemen, especially the mediation of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths, given that his initiative to launch the dialogue process is crucial to our common goal of bringing peace to "the forgotten conflict in Yemen", to paraphrase his earlier remarks, in the hope that the next session of consultations, scheduled for the end of January, will see progressive progress towards reaching the light at the end of the tunnel. We encourage the parties to the conflict to respect this new process.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to thank Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their comprehensive briefings. Their efforts to restore peace and stability in Yemen and improve the humanitarian situation in the country are highly appreciated.

China welcomes the important progress achieved in the intra-Yemeni talks in Sweden. The United Nations and Special Envoy Griffiths overcame all manner of difficulties and worked with the Yemeni parties with great perseverance. Secretary-General Guterres went to Sweden in person to lend his support to the consultations and push for breakthroughs in the Yemeni issue, which China applauds. The Kingdom of Sweden hosted the consultations and members of the group of 19 attended the event, making important contributions to the overall success of the consultations. The Yemeni parties made important decisions in the interest of their country's future and the well-being of the Yemeni people, thereby ending the impasse, which we welcome.

We are pleased to note the important outcomes of the consultations in Sweden, namely, the agreement on a ceasefire in Al-Hudaydah, a mutual understanding on Taiz and an executive mechanism on activating a prisoner exchange agreement. More significantly, the Yemeni parties agreed to host the next round of consultations, scheduled for the end of January, to discuss a framework document to facilitate further political negotiations in Yemen. The Swedish consultations therefore mark a good start and their significance is threefold.

First, the ceasefire in Al-Hudaydah governorate was achieved ahead of schedule, which will help to prevent any further deterioration of the Yemeni economy or humanitarian situation. Secondly, the event has the potential to become a key turning point in the situation in Yemen, as well as the starting point for a new political process that will help the parties in Yemen to build mutual trust. Thirdly, it brings hope to the people of Yemen and the international community as a whole. It is inspiring and boosts morale.

Having said all of that, the challenges now confronting the political efforts to resolve the Yemeni issue are also threefold, to say the least.

First, Yemen's national security and economic woes have been snowballing for many years. The problems are chronic and deep-rooted and defy an easy fix, while the broader context remains fragile. Secondly, a ceasefire has yet to be achieved across the whole of Yemen. We cannot afford to underestimate the risk of further military friction or conflict escalation. Thirdly, major differences remain between the intra-Yemeni parties and the foundations of confidence are still shaky. It is particularly important to avoid misunderstandings and accidents.

As the situation currently stands, we believe that the international community should rise to action on three fronts.

First, we must ensure the implementation in good faith of the consultations in Sweden. Efforts should be made to push the Yemeni parties to implement an immediate ceasefire in Al-Hudaydah governorate within the agreed time frame, complete the redeployment of the respective forces as scheduled, implement the prisoner exchange agreement and seek solutions to the Taiz issue. By fully exercising the United Nations oversight function in the port of Al-Hudaydah and taking advantage of the favourable external conditions, including the ceasefire agreement and redeployment of troops, the United Nations should work to ensure safe, swift and unhindered access to Yemen for commercial and humanitarian supplies to be delivered as soon as possible to the Yemeni population, effectively reduce the risk of famine and provide the injured and sick with much-needed treatment.

Secondly, we must build on the Sweden consultations and facilitate a sustainable and effective dialogue in the negotiations process. The Yemeni parties should continue their consultations on the

opening of Sana'a airport to commercial flights and the payment of salaries to Yemen's public-sector staff. The parties should agree at a practicable agreement as soon as possible and build greater mutual trust. We look forward to the parties in Yemen reaching an agreement on a framework document for political negotiations at the end of January to implement a ceasefire across the whole of Yemen and establish a comprehensive package, including political and security arrangements.

Thirdly, the United Nations must continue to play a leading role in mediation and good offices. The Council should continue to lend political support to the intra-Yemeni peace talks and urge regional countries to continue to provide constructive assistance to that end. The international community should increase its humanitarian assistance and provide targeted support, including food, medical and financial assistance. Yemen should receive support in improving its economic situation, stabilizing prices and ensuring the safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access to meet the basic needs of the Yemeni population.

There is no alternative to the political track in striving to resolve the Yemeni issue. There is no military solution that can secure lasting peace. The international community should maintain Yemen's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, while supporting efforts to achieve an inclusive solution, through dialogue and negotiation, based on resolution 2216 (2015), including the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its implementation mechanism and the outcomes of Yemen's National Dialogue Conference.

China has been consistently committed to advancing the political settlement process in Yemen. The Chinese Ambassador to Yemen was present throughout the entire process of the consultations held in Sweden. China, along with the rest of the international community, will continue to support the United Nations in advancing the Yemeni-led and Yemeni-owned political settlement process, with a view to reaching an early solution leading to a comprehensive, lasting and effective settlement of the Yemeni issue.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation is grateful for the briefing provided by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths. We take this opportunity to express to him our utmost support and our gratitude for his tireless ongoing efforts to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict in Yemen. We are grateful also for the briefing delivered by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock.

My delegation welcomes and commends the active and constructive participation of the parties to the Yemeni conflict in the United Nations-led conference hosted by the Government of Sweden. The outcome of the conference provides a glimmer of hope that must continue to shine ever brighter until we can achieve a peaceful, negotiated solution to the delicate situation prevailing in Yemen.

We take this opportunity to convey to the Government and the people of Sweden our sincere gratitude and appreciation for their contribution to ensuring the holding of this important event. We also express our utmost gratitude to the Special Envoy for all the consultations and negotiations held and the measures taken to ensure that the necessary forum for constructive dialogue was in place, as was seen during the conference.

We also commend the role played by various Member States, including Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the permanent members of the Council. We wish to highlight also the leadership of the Secretary-General, António Guterres, in this important undertaking.

There can be no doubt that one of the most important achievements of the conference was the signing of the agreement on a ceasefire in the port and city of Al-Hudaydah and on the withdrawal of all armed groups from the ports of Saleef and Ras Isa. The implementation and oversight of the agreement will be entrusted to a committee comprising the United Nations and the parties to the conflict. We would also underscore the commitment undertaken by parties to grant an active role to the United Nations in supporting the Yemen Red Sea Ports Corporation in the administration of the ports of Al-Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Isa. The agreement provides for the income generated at those ports to be directly transferred to the Central Bank of Yemen for the benefit of the population at large.

We also take note of the progress made towards continued talks between the parties in order to agree upon the future reopening of Sana'a airport, and we highlight the measures taken to initiate a dialogue on the situation in Taiz and on the implementation of the prisoner exchange agreement as a confidence-building measure.

It is important to bear in mind that after four years of clashes and violence, it is the civilian population that has been the most acutely affected by the scourge of war, as has been eloquently stated by Mr. Lowcock. We must recall also that more than 10,000 people have died and more than 2 million have been internally displaced. Food insecurity afflicts approximately two thirds of the population, 8 million of whom are on the brink of famine. This grave situation represents a threat that must be contained and mitigated through effective measures, which will be possible only if all parties commit to facilitating the safe and unhindered entry of humanitarian assistance, food and basic consumer goods, which are crucial to the survival of the population in general and especially for the more than 400,000 children suffering from acute malnutrition, who require urgent assistance.

In that respect, we call on the parties to maintain the spirit of commitment and dialogue that prevailed at the conference and to fully implement and adhere to the agreements reached, as well as to continue to work unconditionally with the Special Envoy to continue the dialogue in January next year, in order to ultimately achieve an agreement that benefits the Yemeni people and promotes their well-being.

We also appeal to the members of the Council to maintain the unity that is necessary to effectively support the aforementioned efforts.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Martin Griffiths, for his detailed briefing on the recent round of intra-Yemeni consultations held in Sweden, as well as to Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his overview of the humanitarian situation in the Republic of Yemen. We thank the Government of Sweden for its assistance in preparing and holding these extremely important negotiations, and we welcome the new Permanent Representative of Yemen to the United Nations.

Like many other members of the Security Council, we would like to believe that in the light of the agreements arrived at in Stockholm, we are entering a new stage in the conflict in Yemen. We hope that through further concerted efforts we can establish a ceasefire throughout the country and help the millions of Yemeni civilians in dire need of one kind or another of aid and who are starving and have no access to the necessary medical treatment and medicines. Mr. Lowcock's briefing gives a clear picture of the scale of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, now the worst in the world. The Rubicon that we have reached as a result of the process launched in Sweden must now be crossed. That will hinge on implementing the agreements reached during the first round of the intra-Yemeni consultations. We must all give the Special Envoy our collective support.

We believe that the first task is facilitating the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the withdrawal of troops from Al-Hudaydah port and city. Success in that area is important not only to advancing the de-escalation process throughout the country but also to ensuring the sustained delivery of humanitarian and commercial cargo to Yemen's northern regions, where the majority of the country's population is living. We must also assist as much as we possibly can, with United Nations participation, in establishing a bilateral coordination committee to monitor the disengagement of forces in Al-Hudaydah. We believe this part of the agreement package is critical to Mr. Griffiths' further mediation efforts including in the context of the holding of a new round of talks early next year.

We welcome the other important mutual understandings that will help to bring the parties to the conflict to a new level of dialogue and trust, achieved with Mr. Griffiths' active coordination. This applies to the agreements on the exchange of thousands of prisoners of war, which will be implemented before the end of January 2019 under the oversight of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and on the modalities for resuming oil and gas exports.

We would like to highlight the Special envoy's enormous professionalism and the Secretary-General's personal contribution to the successful completion of the Stockholm talks. Russia has also contributed to facilitating progress in the intra-Yemeni negotiation process in its national capacity, as a permanent member of the Security Council and as a member of the Group of 19. In our view, the support to Mr. Griffiths' efforts in Sweden provided by representatives of the international community was virtually ideal. We felt that the cohesive efforts of the five permanent members of the Security Council were particularly helpful to the Special Envoy at critical moments, and we think this effective assistance format should be made permanent.

Some equally important issues remain unresolved, however, specifically regarding the economic front and the airport in Sana'a, and which the Yemenis will have

to agree on in subsequent negotiation rounds. Needless to say, the prospects for their resolution depend a great deal on maintaining the political will of the conflicting parties to implement the agreements that have already been reached. Our shared goal is to keep the political process afloat so that it is the political dialogue that sets the tone for the developments on the ground rather than the other way around. That is the only way to make progress in ending this bloody war, which has done colossal damage to Yemen's economy and people. We have the power to remedy the situation. We must act collectively. We call for further joint efforts in support of United Nations efforts in Yemen. There can be no military solution to the conflict there, and the sole priority must be focusing on the Yemeni people's interests.

Russia is open to cooperation in settling the conflict in Yemen as well as in advancing peace and stability throughout the Middle East. We consider Russia's concept for security and cooperation in the Persian Gulf — and, ultimately, the entire Middle East — very relevant. We will continue our efforts to implement it in consultation with all interested parties. We firmly believe that it will enable us to exchange the atmosphere of threat and confrontation in the region for one of dialogue and cooperation.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

I would like to begin by welcoming the presence among us of the new Permanent Representative of Yemen and wishing him every success in his duties. I would also like to thank the countries of the Gulf region, especially Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia, for making it possible to foster hope at the meeting in Stockholm. I also thank Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their briefings, which underscored the need for the Security Council to remain united and engaged in the quest for durable solutions to the serious social, political and humanitarian crisis that has gripped Yemen for the past four years.

My delegation welcomes this briefing following the consultations that have been being held since 6 December in Stockholm between representatives of the Yemeni Government and the Houthi rebels. That is a testament to what humankind is capable of when will and good faith are in abundance. Let us recall that the purpose of those consultations was to establish a framework conducive to constructive exchanges on thorny issues between the protagonists, as well as to build confidence in order to facilitate the settlement of the political and humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

My country thanks the Swedish authorities for hosting those important consultations to give peace a chance in Yemen. We were satisfied to note the personal commitment of Secretary-General António Guterres, which led to the success of the negotiations in Stockholm. My delegation welcomes the fact that, in a context of heightened tensions, the consultations led to an agreement that, among other things, focuses on an immediate ceasefire in the port city of Al-Hudaydah, a strategic city through which more than 75 per cent of humanitarian aid passes, the redeployment of forces outside the city within a maximum of 21 days starting from the entry into force of the ceasefire, the establishment of a joint committee, overseen by the United Nations, to oversee redeployment and mine clearance, and the cessation of hostilities in the besieged city of Taiz, which should be accessible again thanks to the opening of humanitarian corridors.

My delegation welcomes the relative calm observed over the past few days in the Yemeni theatre of conflict, as well as the signing of the agreement reached prior to the beginning of the talks. That includes the exchange of more than 15,000 prisoners, thanks to the mediation of Special Envoy Griffiths. The inter-Yemeni consultations that just concluded in Stockholm generate new hope for peace and could also serve as a prelude to the end of the suffering endured by the Yemeni people since the outbreak of hostilities — which have plunged this country into one of the most worst humanitarian crises, according to the United Nations. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the strong and encouraging gesture of the symbolic handshake between the Yemeni Minister for Foreign Affairs and the representative of the Houthi rebels, in the presence of the Secretary-General.

Despite the hope kindled by the talks for an end to the crisis in Yemen, several points of contention remain. I refer to the reopening of Sana'a airport to international civilian traffic and its oversight and, ultimately, political arrangements between the parties to the conflict for the final settlement of this crisis. My delegation remains concerned about the development of

those troublesome issues and calls on the belligerents to remain willing to continue discussions, without preconditions, in accordance with the commitments made at the end of the Stockholm consultations, with a view to holding upcoming negotiations scheduled for January.

My country commends and encourages the organs and agencies of the United Nations system for their efforts to restore peace in Yemen. We also congratulate the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for their involvement in the peace process in the region. My delegation hopes that all efforts undertaken by the international community will lead to lasting solutions for the well-being of the Yemeni people, as well as for security and stability on the Arabian peninsula.

Finally, Côte d'Ivoire calls for a peaceful and definitive settlement of the crisis, with respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen, in the interest of its people. We also urge all stakeholders to strengthen the negotiating framework to render it more inclusive, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on presiding over the Security Council this month. I wish you and the friendly delegation of Côte d'Ivoire all the best. I would also like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to address the Council.

I wish to thank Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their valuable briefings and efforts. On behalf of the Government and the people of Yemen, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the Government and the people of Sweden for hosting the round of consultations on Yemen held from 6 to 13 December. I would also like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to Secretary-General António Guterres for his personal commitment to, and interest in, supporting the efforts at bringing peace to Yemen, as well as for attending the final consultations in Sweden.

We have come to this meeting today filled with great hope and optimism thanks to what was achieved in the consultations that concluded yesterday in Sweden, which focused on confidence-building measures. Although we had greater hopes to bring to an end to everything causing the suffering of the Yemeni people, we remain cautious due to our previous experiences, especially as the Houthi militias have not only shown a lack of commitment to previous agreements but have in fact turned against them every time. We have signed more than 75 agreements with those militias since the start of their aggression, which has been sponsored by Iran for four years. They did not implement their side of the agreements.

We look forward to the United Nations shouldering its responsibility for implementing the agreements. What was recently agreed upon with the Houthis will remain a dead letter until implemented on the ground. That would then reflect their sincere intentions and pave the way towards further positive steps on other matters. In that regard, we highly appreciate the efforts made by Special Envoy Griffiths and his team, as well as the countries sponsoring the political process in Yemen, particularly our brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the State of Kuwait and the Sultanate of Oman. Their efforts facilitated the holding and success of that round of consultations, as well as reaching an agreement to put an end to the suffering of hostages, prisoners, detainees and those who have been missing and forcefully disappeared or abducted. The return of those people will ensure smiles on the faces of their mothers, children and parents. In addition, the efforts made have led to an agreement on the withdrawal from the port city of Al-Hudaydah and the declaration of understanding on Taiz.

The Government of Yemen has made many concessions to end the suffering, which continues to burden the living conscience of everyone. We have said time and again that we stand ready to go all the way to bring peace to Yemen, because we are the ones most keen to end the suffering of our people. We will seize any serious opportunity to bring about real, just, comprehensive and sustainable peace, based on the three terms of reference agreed upon, namely, the Gulf Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2216 (2015).

The Government of Yemen reaffirms that it will continue its sincere efforts to reach peaceful solutions that put an end to the coup d'état, restore the legitimate State institutions and resume the political process from where it was stopped before the coup. His Excellency President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi of the Republic of

Yemen emphasized that the Yemeni Government is ready to participate anywhere and anytime in any future peace consultations, on the condition that the Houthi militias actually implement what was in Sweden.

We had also hoped to reach agreement on the remaining issues, such as taking confidence-building measures concerning the opening of Sana'a airport, ending the siege on the city of Taiz and reaching an economic agreement. However, the intransigence of the Houthis, backed by Iran, and their insistence on continuing the suffering of the Yemeni people have squandered our hope.

We recently heard members of the Security Council and the international community in this Chamber express their deep concern for the continued Iranian support to the Houthi militias, including supplying them with missiles and weapons, in clear violation of international resolutions, especially resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2015). Iran continues to destabilize the region through its Houthi proxies and Hizbullah in Lebanon and other countries of the region. The Iranian regime will not succeed with that policy, and Yemenis will not accept such a policy of destabilizing security and stability. Iran must end its malice and stop interfering in the internal affairs of my country. The international community must bring further pressure to bear on the Iranian regime so as to alleviate the suffering of the Iranian people and harness its resources for the prosperity of its people, instead of leveraging support for terrorist groups and its proxies in the region.

The Government of Yemen undertook a number of measures to face the economic breakdown and deterioration of its currency, as well as to restore the Yemeni economy from the black market to the formal banking system. It also undertook measures to manage and regulate the demand on foreign currency. The most important results from the package of decisions and measures undertaken by the Government are as follows.

First, we succeeded in halting the economic breakdown and bringing about relative stability to the local currency, by promoting its value against foreign currencies. The exchange rate of the Yemeni Rial against the dollar moved from 840 rials to the dollar to approximately 450 rials recently.

Second, we restored a large part of cash and commercial transactions from the black market to the formal banking sector, which is committed to the international requirements and standards of transparency and combating the financing of terrorism and money laundering, especially after the Houthi militias used such money during the previous period in the black market in order to finance their activities after they took control of the Central Bank in Sana'a in 2015.

Third, we have provided financial and banking services and the necessary foreign currency to import basic foodstuffs to all Yemeni governorates at adequate prices, which are lower than the prices on the black market. That led to the availability of commodities in all governorates at reduced prices by all traders, as a result of the efforts of the legitimate Government to promote food security and restore its normalcy throughout the governorates.

Fourth, we have curbed the use of petroleum products and derivatives to finance armed groups and undertake money laundering, while reactivating the monitoring and regulating mechanisms to help achieve peace, enhance State institutions and promote our national economy.

Fifth, we have restored and regularized the payment of pensions in all governorates by the legitimate Government, despite the fact that the coup militias have confiscated the balances of different pension funds and institutions from the Central Bank in Sana'a.

Sixth, we have established an integrated system of procedures and execution plans on promoting State resources and rationalizing expenses to ensure the sustained and organized payment of salaries for civil servants all over the country.

Seventh, we are coordinating intensively with our brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to implement reconstruction and development programmes in Yemen. Works have started on the ground through the Saudi programme for reconstruction and development in some governorates in Yemen, especially by providing the necessary oil derivatives for generating electricity at a monthly cost of $60 million. That will enhance the ability of the Government to shoulder its responsibilities, particularly to pay salaries and improve the humanitarian situation.

The Government cannot undertake its economic and humanitarian responsibilities throughout Yemen without the support of the international community in all areas, or do so without compelling the coup militias to cease their activities and measures that lead only to

further humanitarian and economic deterioration in Yemen. Hence, the following should be implemented.

First, the relevant State institutions must be allowed to undertake their independent national duties and shoulder their responsibilities to safeguard the humanitarian and economic situations, especially the Yemeni Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance and all other affiliated institutions.

Secondly, coup militias must be stopped from carrying out practices that terrorize traders, banks and bankers. The aim is to benefit from the services and opportunities provided by the legitimate Government based in the interim capital, Aden.

Thirdly, all sovereign State revenues must be deposited in the Central Bank, under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance and the Yemeni legitimate Government, and the imposition of illegal fees and levies on the citizens must be halted.

Fourthly, freedom of trade and the movement must be allowed for commodities and money transfers among various governorates and bank branches and traders.

Fifthly, exports of oil derivatives must resume, including ensuring their safe passage from areas that are under the control of the coup militias.

Sixthly, coup militias must be stopped from interfering in the trade in oil derivatives and stop promoting the black market, especially when those militias sell at 150 per cent more than the regular prices, which worsens the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the suffering of the citizens and could lead to the collapse of the local currency.

Seventhly, all international organizations working in Yemen or supporting it must make all their financial transactions through the Central Bank of Yemen.

Based on our national responsibilities towards our citizens, the Government of Yemen has attached great importance and priority to the humanitarian issue over the past four years, including launching its decentralization relief and humanitarian programme. Thanks to that programme, we have designated land and sea corridors in Yemen that will ensure the flow of humanitarian and relief assistance to the most-affected people and regions. The Government remains focused on alleviating the suffering of the Yemeni people and ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout Yemen. In that regard, we highly commend the generous aid provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the State of Kuwait and all other sisterly and friendly countries.

The Government of Yemen welcomes the pledging conference to be held on 26 February 2019 under the auspices of the Secretary-General and the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland. We call upon friendly donor countries to support the humanitarian response plan and make their pledges in order to fill the financial gap and address the deteriorating economic situation in Yemen.

In conclusion, the outcome of the consultations held in Sweden is a serious step towards building trust. It bodes well for achieving peace, which is awaited by the great people of Yemen. The Government of Yemen continues to offer concessions, regardless of how difficult they are, to achieve sustainable peace based on the agreed upon terms of reference, because we believe that war is launched by fools and peace is made by the courageous.

We call on the Council to work on implementing its resolutions on the situation in Yemen, especially resolution 2216 (2015), in order to put an end to the conflict. We do not need more resolutions.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.